re-BUS

You have downloaded a document from
RE-BUŚ
repository of the University of Silesia in Katowice

Title: Approaches of infinity : the sublime and the social : studies in eighteenth-century writings

Author: Tadeusz Rachwał

Citation style: Rachwał Tadeusz. (1993). Approaches of infinity : the sublime and the social : studies in eighteenth-century writings. Katowice : Uniwersytet Śląski

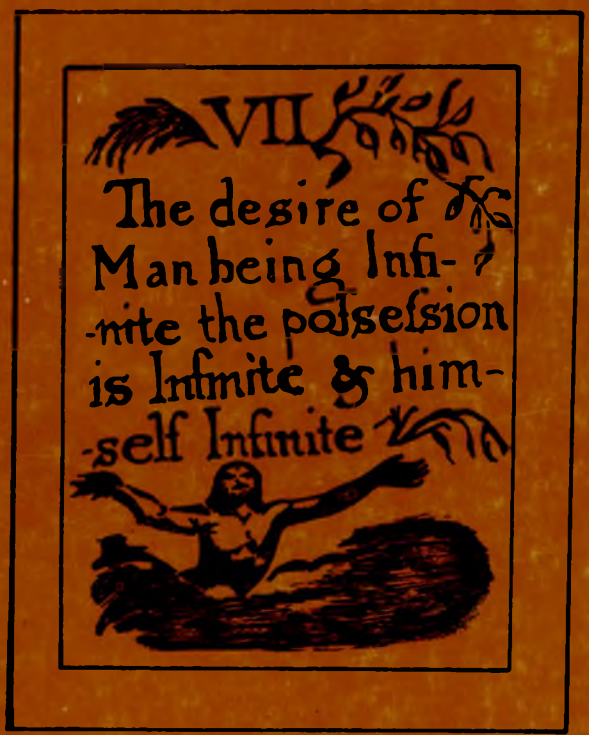
Uznanie autorstwa - Na tych samych warunkach - Licencja ta pozwala na kopiowanie, zmienianie, rozprowadzanie, przedstawianie i wykonywanie utworu tak długo, jak tylko na utwory zależne będzie udzielana taka sama licencja.

UNIWERSYTET ŚLĄSKI W KATOWICACH
Biblioteka Uniwersytetu Śląskiego
Ministerstwo Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego

Tadeusz Rachwał

Approaches of Infinity
The Sublime and the Social

Studies
in Eighteenth-Century Writings



Uniwersytet Śląski ● Katowice 1993

Approaches of Infinity
The Sublime and the Social

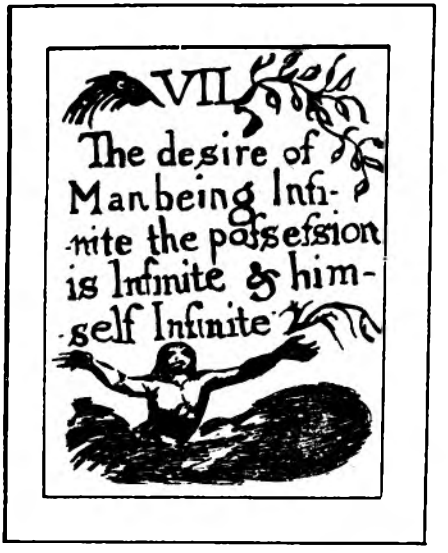
Studies
in Eighteenth-Century Writings

Prace Naukowe
Uniwersytetu Śląskiego
w Katowicach
nr 1368

Tadeusz Rachwał

Approaches of Infinity
The Sublime and the Social

Studies
in Eighteenth-Century Writings



Uniwersytet Śląski Katowice 1993

Editor of the Series:
History of Foreign Literatures
ALEKSANDER ABŁAMOWICZ

Reviewer
WANDA RULEWICZ

Cover illustration: W. Blake, *There is No Natura*
Religion (a fragment). Reproduced from th
facsimile published by the William Blake Trus

N 289/ 1368

Contents

I

The Sublime and Postmodern Positions (Introductory)

> At the edge of postmodernism, then, no idea or theory or word or even feeling is above suspicion, and whatever postmodernism does or says seems to take that fact, perhaps only that fact, as given.
>
> Berel Lang, *Postmodernism in Philosophy: Nostalgia for the Future, Waiting for the Past*

In *Le Pas au-dela* (1973) Maurice Blanchot writes about "time before time," which is "outside of time in time" (*hors de temps dans temps*).[1] Blanchot's time is always already past, it withdraws before its beginning and becomes "dreadfully ancient," "always lacking the present."[2] Time is as it were exterior to itself and there is nowhere to sign on its beginning, there is nowhere to assign limits as to make time present, as to represent it. Time's outside inhabits its inside, and thus inhibits its totalization, its becoming an object, a fact, a simple and single meaning of the sign "time." Time's outside-inside inhibits its representation. Facing time we face something "dreadfully ancient" not quite in the sense of very old in time, but from beyond time, and thus from "before" history, alien to history, to its writings which can present ancient times, domesticate them in the form of a coherent story, but which cannot domesticate time. Thus Blanchot reads time as

---

[1] M. Blanchot, "Le Pas au-dela" (Paris: Gallimard 1973), p. 54. Quoted in English in *Deconstruction in Context. Literature and Philosophy*, M. C. Taylor, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1986), p. 31.

[2] Ibid., pp. 23 and 25.

a threatening outside, as the other of the chronologically safe time constructed by history.

This idea of a "dreadfully ancient" time, of time as both dreadful and ancient, does not present or represent time but only posits it within the sphere of the "nonpresent," within the sphere which endangers the presence by the possibility of its being absent which Blanchot elsewhere calls "the nonabsent absence."[3] The feeling of danger, the threat is caused by the paradox that something that we are facing, that an object of our interest might simply be not what it is, or seems to be, because despite our certainty of its existence it is always beyond our grasp, beyond our power to categorize or represent.

For Jean-Francois Lyotard such a threat is a sublime sentiment. Commenting on Kant's idea of the sublime he writes:

> The sublime [...] takes place [...] when the imagination fails to present an object which might, if only in principle, come to match a concept. We have the Idea of the world (the totality of what is), but we do not have the capacity to show an example of it. We have the Idea of the simple (that which cannot be broken down, decomposed), but we cannot illustrate it with a sensible object which would be a "case" of it. We can conceive the infinitely great, the infinitely powerful, but every presentation of an object destined to "make visible" this absolute greatness or power appears to us painfully inadequate. Those are Ideas of which no presentation is possible. [...] They can be said to be unpresentable.[4]

The sublime is thus "something" which always evades any adequate sign and it is for this reason that the sublime itself cannot be an adequate category, a presentable one. In other words, the sublime as the fear of the "painfully inadequate" caused by the unpresentable is equally unpresentable as the cause of this fear cannot be presented either. Just as there is no adequate sign of time, there is no adequate sign of the sublime, and it is for this reason, it seems, that, in Lyotard, the "sublime sentiment" **takes place** rather than "is." If it takes place in the face of a nonabsent absence, in the face of something whose presence cannot be made present, it does not only "take place," but it also as it were "takes time," that is to say, is posited, as nonpresent (or nonabsent, for that matter), in the space of time which transgresses presence, which goes beyond the "now" of the present and "takes time" outside the chronological order of presentable facts, as a nothingness, an 'object' without a 'where' or 'when.'

Nothingness is of course a 'thing' whose presentation is hardly possible and, at least in the Kantian sense, it is also sublime. Although Saussure, to take the example of one of the 'fathers' of structuralism, explicitly mentions

---

[3] Cf. M. Blanchot, "The Absence of the Book," in *Deconstruction...*, p. 391.

[4] J.-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1984), p. 78.

difference as constitutive of presence, this difference is simultaneously rendered as a nothingness through the postulate of the priority of the synchronic description which renders difference actually alien to being written about. Difference, like the Kantian sublime, cannot be an object of (synchronic) description, be it linguistic or historical. What seems to be making poststructuralism poststructuralism (or postmodernism postmodernism), on the other hand, is an attempt at writing down what cannot be written, an attempt at postulating a paradoxical epistemology of the sublime supplementing the aesthetic of the sublime which Lyotard regards as the instituting gesture of modernism.[5]

In the case of post-structuralism one can hardly talk about aesthetics pure and simple at all. Lyotard seems to be implying this when he writes that a "postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work."[6] If a postmodern writer is a philosopher, a poststructuralist philosopher is a writer, and thus it is impossible to distinguish between, say, creative and factual writing. The poststructural condition is the condition of what I have called the epistemology of the sublime, of what Lyotard calls putting forward the unpresentable in the presentation itself. Such a 'putting forward,' or writing, is obviously alien to factographic historicality because its temporality is equally paradoxical as its 'teleology without a telos,' to use Wojciech Kalaga's phrase a little out of context.[7] As an attempt to write the nonpresent, and in some paradoxical sense to write nothing, a post-structuralist writer (or critic), like Lyotard's postmodern one, has to write what "would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (post) anterior (modo)."[8]

It is in the wake of this paradox that the idea of difference (which in de Saussure was constitutive of language simultaneously remaining outside the scope of serious linguistic interest) becomes, for Derrida, for instance, a sphere of exploration within the unpresentable meaning of the word *différance*, the errant word in which "a" replaces "e," and whose irreducible polysemy (differ/defer) makes any positive identification of this word unthinkable. Such a word marks "a past that has never been present," says Derrida quoting Levinas in an essay on *différance*.[9] "*Différance* (with an a) [...] can refer

[5] Ibid., p. 81.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Cf. W. Kalaga, "Teleology without a Telos," *Znakolog*, 1992.

[8] J.-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern...*, p. 81.

[9] J. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. A. Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1982), p. 21.

simultaneously to the entire configuration of its meanings."[10] Unlike Saussure's difference, *différance* neither simply causes presence nor is it simply present itself. As a past that has never been present it is a mark, a trace of the present which itself can never be complete, which cannot be totalized into a unity. *Différance* is thus also unpresentable in terms of the temporality of the present, which is the temporality of history, and as such it is a also the sign of time which questions the presence of the present.

The postmodern sublime is thus a non-category of sorts in which the questioning of the present finds a provisional epistemological ground which enables thinkers like Lyotard to talk about the presentation of unpresentable. The 'revival' of the sublime in the postmodern age, which is also the age of science and technology, provides a space for a counter-discourse which, paradoxical as it may sound, protects the present by questioning it, by engaging itself in the problems of the materiality of language, in the paradoxes of reflection.

The age of science and technology is also the age productive of what one might call virtual realities, of the realities which translate the world into mathematical-logical formulae constituting the 'more real' reality systematically underlying our less orderly wanderings of experience. If the postmodern consists in putting forward the unpresentable, the sublime, in presentation itself, as Lyotard has it, it puts it as a veil of sorts upon the experientially inaccessible virtual projections of the world revealing the inevitable "dance of iteration," as Noel Gray puts it, inscribed within the very possibility of virtualizing reality:

> However, as virtual reality must constantly return to so-called ordinary experience for its impetus and in some senses its validation, may we not then say that the endless march of science discloses itself as a dance of iteration — the return that is *forever beginning in an immediate virtual ending*?[11]

Regardless of the cybernetic claims that materiality has at last been overcome giving way to some "Cyberspace,"[12] it is the materiality of the signifier which, in the hands of Derrida, for instance, begins the dance of iteration over the cyberspace of the mathematical truth whose orderly infinity is thinkable only in the infinity of the virtual worlds it can produce. If Derrida, for instance, "activates, for some people in the world today, the emotions waiting in a gulf

---

[10] Ibid., p. 8.

[11] N. Gray, "Seeing Nature. The Mathematization of Experience in Virtual Realities," unpublished paper presented at the ISSEI conference (European Integration and the European Mind: Cultural Hegemony or Dialogue of Cultures), Aalborg, August 1992, p. 6 of the manuscript.

[12] Cf. *Cyberspace: First Steps*, B. Michael, ed. (Massachusetts: MIT Press 1991).

of Chaos," as William Kerrigan puts it, by disturbing the intimate presuppositions of individual existence, by disturbing our distinctness,[13] it is exactly because this distinctness has been removed from the surface, or materiality, of the world to some virtual world of distinct mathematical categories. The presentation of the unpresentable, of the sublime, is thus an attempt, however paradoxical, let us repeat, at representing 'unpresentability' of the present, an attempt at a protection of the materiality against the approaches of the infinity of mathematical-logical formulae which virtualize the world thus making it presentable, though, perhaps, nonexistent. The sublime reappears at the end of the twentieth century not as a threatening other, but actually as a warning against the virtualizing discourse and language which remove, or at least attempt at removing, the materiality of the social space we live in, the ordinary experience of reading and writing, for instance, to an already overcome sphere which actually, or virtually, exists somewhere else. Such an overcoming of materiality actually means mastery over infinity, a universal law which now, objectively, from the position of the absolute objectivity of mathematics, can legitimately actualize its virtual worlds, manufacture a (human) nature no longer threatened by the approaches of the chaos of materiality, of the unrepresentable which Derrida, for instance, puts forward in presentation.

It is from this (or that) paradoxical, uncertain, unpresentable position(s) of the postmodern epistemology of the sublime, of the unpresentable, that I want to look back at yet another 'revival' of the sublime in the eighteenth-century aesthethics, philosophy and literature. In other words, from the position which questions the idea of presentation I will look at some texts in which the presentation of the sublime is, implicitly or explicitly, at stake. It is for this reason that the question of what the sublime really is will be left mostly unanswered throughout these pages. What will be indicated in this reading of the eighteenth-century sublime, however, is that the question of presenting the unpresentable is not an oxymoronic pun upon which deconstructive quibbling feeds thus contaminating Academia with a discourse which undermines its (Academia's) foundation of the presentable truth, but rather that it is the question which, remaining unresolved (unless one is really serious saying that he or she has at last overcome and explained the world), motivates and in fact establishes the position of the discursing subject not only epistemologically, but also politically within a particular social structure whose truth or truths come from within rather than from a virtual,

---

[13] W. Kerrigan, "Atoms Again: The Deaths of Individualism," in *Taking Chances: Derrida, Psychoanalysis, and Literature*, J. H. Smith and W. Kerrigan, eds. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1984), p. 104.

external, impersonal (objective) system of living whose rules we, imperfect beings, constantly violate.

Descartes, let's be simplistic for a while, doubted whether he existed, his doubt undermining not only Academia, but also the meaning of the verb "to be" which he saved by translating it into "I think" thus depriving "being" of the possibility of impersonal, objective, existence. The question of presenting the unpresentable lurks in the Cartesian text in a very Derridean manner, Ralph Flores notices, as his "Cogito is staged both as naked thought and dressed in language."[14] What saves Cartesian discourse and makes it classifiable as philosophical is exactly his doubt in writing, his declared hatred of "the profession of bookmaking" which relegates the truth of his "I" to his mind, to the sphere of the unpresentable without questioning the presence of the "I."

Descartes' withdrawal from representation, his phenomenological reduction of the presentable world posits a sphere of the unpresentable which simultaneously, as it were, longs for some sort of presentation. The eighteenth century, without quite denying the Cartesian method, will concentrate on the improvement of representation, on the rendition of the unpresentable as presentable. The category of the sublime in the eighteenth century, as I see it, is an idea which 'classical' discourse 'revives' via rewriting Longinus' rhetorical device (*hypsos*) and translates it into a background category against which it wants to define nature (along with human nature) as the sphere of the visible, of the presentable, or at least of the sensible. Hence, for instance, Locke's translation of personal identity to a writing commemorated upon a slate, the foregrounding of taste as the crucial category of social coexistence or, however vain, attempts at making music visible so that the deaf might "see the music of the ears" as was the case with Bertrand's colour organ exhibited in London in 1775.[15] Rather than withdrawing, like Descartes, from the visible to unpresentable, the Enlightenment brings a torch to all the dark places of the world, to quote Conrad a little out of context, simultaneously rendering those things to which light cannot be brought, which cannot be brought into light, as inhuman, wild, purely horrible. Hence also, as we shall see, attempts at domesticating the sublime within the social space as an aesthetic category which, as such, is partially presentable, accessible to senses as a pleasurable horror. It is this gesture of translating unpresentable into presentable which seems to characterise the search for reason in the Age of Reason. This gesture simultaneously reduces the very idea of perception of the unpresentable,

[14] R. Flores, *The Rhetoric of Doubtful Authority. Deconstructive Readings of Self-Questioning Narratives, St. Augustine to Faulkner* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 1984), p. 73.

[15] *The Context of English Literature. The Eighteenth Century*, P. Rogers, ed. (London: Methuen 1978), p. 197.

of the infinite (both in time and in space) to a nothingness of sorts, and those who perceive it as madmen or enthusiasts unworthy of the name of man.

The space proper for man in the eighteenth century is thus through and through social space, a home of perceptible, 'tasteful' objects and shared sensations, feelings, sentiments readable from human faces and gestures where infinity is kept at a distance and its approaches are left to the heated imaginations of speculative philosophers who themselves, like Hume, would rather not philosophise because, as we shall see, philosophising approaches the spheres of infinity and is productive of uncertainty and horror of the sublime, of the unpresentable.

Interestingly, unlike in the case of projecting 'cyberspaces' in the modern science, the, say, 'premodern' discourse does not project virtual models of the world through "replicating nature," as Noel Gray phrases it.[16] Rather, it sees order as already hidden within nature, and sees it as a finite order of finite things which can be mathematically expressed, but which cannot be mathematically created. Instead of overcoming materiality, it wants to improve it, diminish to human scope within the human locality of society. Hence the fear of the infinite, of the approaches of infinity which are discernible both in the mountainous landscapes of the Alps, for instance, and in the infinite creations, or productions, of reason. Reason, being reasonable, actually means constant improvement of reasoning in experience, rather than an ultimate, formulaic explanation of the ways of the world. Hence also the search for the expression of the inexpressible, for the presentation of the unpresentable in quite different a sense than in Lyotard. The eighteenth century searches for rules and principles of the order of the world whose expression always already smacks of being a production of reason, of an artifice, or even a dictate, which does not come from nature. Hence also the centrality of taste and common sense as naturally reasonable mechanisms justifying what Terry Eagleton calls our "biological insertion into the world."

Taste is not, of course, a precise category as it is always associated with subjectivity, with being subjective, and in its generalization there is always involved a necessity of theorising it and thus making it a category of reason. Without a dint of reason taste is too subjective, and as a govering principle of the society it leaves too much individual freedom of, exactly, doing what one likes. Taste made reasonable takes thus the form of common sense, of a sense negotiable only upon some social space as a compromise between the bodily and the reasonable.

Perhaps in reaction to the Cartesian, theoretical, reduction of the world to a thinking "I," the irresistible, though doubtful, presence of the world outside this thinking commenced "the body's long inarticulate rebellion against

[16] W. Kerrigan, "Atoms...", p. 2.

the tyranny of the theoretical," as Eagleton phrases it.[17] Yet unaware of cybernetics, rather than suggesting virtual realities, classical discourse had to find a somehow more material sphere of exploration, a kind of new world, such as would be agreeable to all, which all would accept without a Cartesian doubt. If Descartes philosophised with his eyes closed, seeing and visibility of the world, as I have already said, become predominant in the eighteenth century.

What follows is thus, in a way, about seeing. And it is exactly the sense of taste with which human eyes, human vision, become endowed in order to be able to distinguish, without doubt, between the human and the non-human. The sphere of vision which is thus created is an extension of the Cartesian "I," a going out of oneself towards the regions which Descartes found dangerous and misleading, and which in the eighteenth century become endowed with security through the "aesthetization" of those regions, through rendering them as pleasurable and agreeable with human nature.

The ultimate borderline of those regions is the sublime, the sphere productive of terror which naturally warns us against itself with its vastness, infinity or eternity which human eye cannot grasp and transpose into an image, a picture, a representation. Man can securely function only upon a territory which he has mapped by himself, reproduced, as it were, into a readable (or readerly) space where there is no room for any epistemology of the sublime (as is the case with the postmodern) because such an epistemology is in fact dangerous to ontological security, to the security of being. The eighteenth-century philosophers and thinkers do go out of Descartes's chamber of meditation, they go for various kinds of both actual and speculative tours, but they do it with a guidebook of taste in their minds.

The theme of life as a tour, as a journey, is obviously a universal one, but the eighteenth-century traveller hardly encounters any monsters on his way, perhaps with the notable and ironic exception of Swift's Yahoos, of men themselves. Life is a history of agreeable events, of events one can represent as facts, and it is in this possibility of representation that the facts are always already rendered as natural events. The defence against the unpresentable, against the anti-social terror without a pleasure finds its expression in such categories as sentiment or 'genius of the place,' for instance, which, as we shall see, translate the world, naturally, into what it should be like, into a better, more natural world whose epitome is the English landscape garden.

Hence the recurrent theme of correction of nature in these pages, of its naturalization. This correction frequently consists in the desublimation of the world (a not quite distant equivalent of the Saussurean differentiation) through the paradoxical denial of the sublime by pointing to it, even by

---

[17] T. Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1990), p. 13.

attempts at theorizing it, in order to show that the sublime is a natural thing only provided that we keep away from it, constantly step back from it and travel in the domesticated space of the already familiar and agreeable where the approaches of infinity are mapped as dangerous regions without roads leading to them.

There will be, as ever, those who will try to map those dangerous regions, go outside the map, as it were, and discover new worlds within this one. In what follows, I read Swedenborg, Blake and Godwin as the transgressors of the sublime who, inevitably, had to posit themselves away from the social simultaneously positing alternative natures without any finitude.

All the above themes the Reader will encounter in the readings of a few texts which I find important and representative for the epoch. There are, of course, many others. Themes are not, again of course, the secure roads of history, and they may occasionally lead one elsewhere. Where infinity is at stake, however, one cannot really write a history of its representations, since it, as yet, has not been quite represented. Approaches of infinity which find their expression in the vagueness of the category of the sublime are not facts, they are not an object of exploration of this or that writer, but, exactly, a theme, frequently implicit, which motivates the social practices, such as writing, for instance, and which links such seemingly distant "fields" as philosophical speculations with the ways one can design one's garden. It is such links, which might be called intertextual, that I attempt to hint at in what follows, the outgrowths of the texts which I have read, or re-read, not in order to eventually unveil the truth of the Sublime, for instance, but rather in order to problematize its "transparent" readings as an aesthetic category pure and simple so as to bring to the fore certain uncertainties as regards the eighteenth-century readings of the world in the face of the approaches of infinity one of whose aspects is, again of course, what I have earlier called the 'revival' of the sublime.

II

Spheres of Infinity (On Addison and His Pleasures)

... but that the soul
Remembering how she felt, but what she felt
Remembering not, retains an obscure sense
Of possible sublimity...

(Wordsworth, *The Prelude*)

The revival of the notion of the sublime in the eighteenth century is frequently regarded as derived from Longinus' *Peri Hupsous* although, as Samuel Monk notices, "there was a general opinion that *Peri Hupsous* was inadequate in its methods of analyzing the aesthetic experience."[1] It was not only inadequate in its methods but also, as it seems, in its subject as the sublimity with which the English writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were concerned could hardly be called a rhetorical category signifying "a certain distinction and excellence of expression, that distinction and excellence by which authors have been enabled to win immortal fame,"[2] as T.S. Dorsch, the modern translator of the famous treatise in Greek by an author known as Longinus, defines the meaning of the word *hypsos* simultaneously adding that there "appears to be no single English word which fully conveys all this."[3]

Some hundred and fifty years earlier than Dorsch, in *Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste* (1805), Richard Payne Knight, explicitly referring

[1] S. H. Monk, *The Sublime* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press 1960), p. 84.
[2] *Classical Literary Criticism* (Penguin Books 1965), p. 24.
[3] Ibid., p. 25.

to the "principles of Longinus," says that "In grasping the infinity the mind exercises the powers of multiplying without end; and, in so doing, it expands and exalts itself, by which means its feelings and sentiments become sublime."[4] From the context of rhetoric and poetry, the concept of the sublime has thus gone very far towards "grasping the infinity," it has become a category closer to the ontology of the infinite than to a rhetorical device that makes for the production of the sublime.

Something which is infinite, which forces the mind to an endless multiplication is hardly compatible with Longinus' postulate of the sublime object's ineffaceable existence in memory.

> For a piece is truly great only if it can stand up to repeated examination, and if it is difficult, or, rather, impossible to resist its appeal, and it remains firmly and ineffaceably in the memory. As a generalization, you may take it that sublimity in all its truth and beauty exists in such works as please all men at all times.[5]

Longinus' sublime is thus a category which is both true and beautiful, but which is simultaneously inevitably historical, an irresistible fact about which one can hardly forget. It is thus also in a way static, and, as such, an object for whose creation or production certain rules can be designed. In Knight's vision of the sublime, on the other hand, no finality seems to be possible and the endlessly multiplying mind can be rightly called a mind in the state of constant convolutions, as it were, in no state at all.

Samuel Monk sees this turn from the rhetorical sublime of Longinus' to what he calls "the pathetic sublime" in early eighteenth-century theoreticians (Addison, Hume, Baille) of emotions whose ideas can be traced back to *Peri Hupsous* in the fact that they regarded the emotions which the sublime awakened as "an end in themselves, rather than as a means to an end" thus making possible an aesthetic theory. "The sublime came," says Monk,

> as a justifiable category into which could be grouped the stronger emotions and the more irrational elements of art. The speed with which theorists assimilated under the Longinian sublime the emotion of terror, horror, and ecstasy, and the vast and more overwhelming aspects of the natural world bears witness to the need which was felt for a method of making respectable the more un-neo-classical elements of art.[6]

Although early eighteenth-century theorists would hardly propagate the idea of an endlessly multiplying mind, for some reason it became necessary to implant some elements of unreason into the discourse of reason. All sorts

---

[4] R. P. Knight, *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste* (London 1805), p. 36.

[5] Longinus, "On the Sublime," trans. T. S. Dorsch, in Aristotle/Horace/Longinus, *Classical Literary Criticism* (Penguin Books 1965), p. 107.

[6] S. H. Monk, *The Sublime...*, p. 85.

of enthusiastic and ecstatic feelings were generally suspicious to the neo-classical eye and Pope, for instance, placed an inspired poet claiming to have any access to some less mundane spheres than those demarcated by the principle of *concordia discors* in Bedlam (cf. *The Dunciad*). Yet such spheres, the spheres of, say, after Knight, the infinite, the spheres which could not be reduced to the classical classes governed by pre-established, natural rules had to be somehow coped with, made respectable, as Monk phrases it. The paradox of basing "the more un-neo-classical" aspects of art on the classical writings of Longinus is but an example of this making respectable the things which are not quite respectable, that are not acceptable, an example of domesticating the areas otherwise regarded as transgressive.

Joseph Addison, frequently referred to as a theoretician of the sublime[7] (mainly on the basis of essays "On the Pleasures of Imagination" published in *The Spectator* in 1712), hardly uses the word "sublime" there. According to Andrew Wilson he "manages to cover most of the ground trodden by subsequent writers"[8] and Paul Crowther claims that many of Kant's ideas on the sublime "are also to be found in Addison's Spectator essays."[9] The role of these essays derives, it seems, not only from the use of the oxymoronic expressions of the type of the "pleasing kind of Horrour" or "pleasing astonishment," so typical for the later writers (like Burke, for instance), but also from his positing of the sphere of the infinite as the object of a potential visualization by imagination. What Addison performs in the essays is a certain rationalization of imagination which eventually is rendered as inferior to reason not because it is unreasonable, but because it is incapable of "keeping pace"with it.

In essay No. 419 Addison writes about the entertainment of readers' imagination by "the Poet [who] quite loses sight of Nature" and tries to present "such Persons as have many of them no Existence, but what he bestows on them."[10] Such persons are, among others, fairies, demons, ghosts and spirits. The loss of the sight of nature in such poets is not complete, however, because such nonexistent objects still have some link with nature as, exactly, persons, that is to say, as objects which human imagination can still visualize, though read them as strange or novel.

---

[7] Cf. e.g. S. H. Monk, *The Sublime...*; A. Wilson, *Turner and the Sublime* (London: British Museum Publications 1980); P. Crowther, *The Kantian Sublime. From Morality to Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1989).

[8] A. Wilson, *Turner and...*, p. 10.

[9] P. Crowther, *The Kantian...*, p. 12.

[10] *Addison and Steele. Selections from 'The Tatler' and 'The Spectator,'* R. J. Allen, ed. (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston 1961), p. 213.

> These Descriptions raise a pleasing kind of Horrour in the Mind of the Reader, and amuse his Imagination with the Strangeness and Novelty of the Persons who are represented in them.[11]

Though the descriptions of ghosts and spirits are horribly pleasing, Addison is not quite in favor of them as the source or object which causes the, say, sublime feelings as the origin of such imaginative creations of which the Ancients did not have much to say, reaches back to "the Darkness and Superstition of later Ages, when pious Frauds were made use of to amuse Mankind and frighten them into a Sense of Duty."[12]

What is dangerous about such descriptions is the possibility of creating parallel, alternative worlds of sorts, worlds governed by a different order than that of man and nature.

> Poetry addresses it self to the Imagination, as it has not only the whole Circle of Nature for its Province, but makes new Worlds of its own, shews us Persons who are not to be found in Being, and represents even the Faculties of the Soul [...] in a sensible Shape and Character.[13]

The use of the word "province" in this context seems to be suggesting that "the whole Circle of Nature" is endangered by the possibility of being something 'more than it is,' and what such poetry does is not an enlargement of the sphere of the real, but, rather, it supplements it with some other sphere, or, better, with the sphere of the Other, like the sphere of ghosts, for instance.

Addison hints more explicitly at this danger of the existence of nonexistent objects when he writes about the "noble Extravagance of Fancy" in Shakespeare's presentation of ghosts and witches in whose speeches there is "something so wild and yet so solemn

> [...] that we cannot forbear thinking them natural, tho' we have no Rule by which to judge of them, and must confess, if there are such Beings in the World, it looks highly probable they should talk and act as he has represented them."[14]

What is at stake seems to be simply the danger of taking the unreal for the real. In the regulated 'classical' world what cannot be regulated and explained, plainly displayed in a table, has the status of nonexistence whose affirming comes dangerously close to madness. In the classical age, Foucault notices. madness does not designate

---

[11] Ibid., p. 214.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid., pp. 215–216.
[14] Ibid., p. 215.

> so much a specific change in the mind or in the body, as the existence, under the body's alterations, under the oddity of conduct and conversation, of a *delirious discourse*.[15]

Delirium becomes thus a key to the definition of classical madness as an articulation of something which from the position of the discourse of reason does not exist. In this sense it is also a transgression, a withdrawal outside the tabulated space of the properly present to the sphere of a certain absence or nothingness, as Foucault puts it, whose paradox consists in the fact that in order to manifest itself as madness this "nothing" must be capable of reappearing within the order of reason. The movement away from the path of reason is already coded in the word delirium which, according to Robert James (an eighteenth-century physician whom Foucault quotes in his book), "is derived from lira, a furrow; so that deliro actually means to move out of the furrow, away from the proper path of reason."[16]

Addison's criticism of the poetic production of "supernatural" beings is grounded upon the possibility of producing a belief that ghosts and fairies might be granted some reality within a different order of things. Imagination can be innocent of unreason in Addison only if it does not openly and explicitly claim its own reality and truth, it must be rooted in the real which, for Addison, seems to be synonymous with the natural. Monstrosity is still an object of our admiration because it is an example of something unusual and uncommon in nature and it is this strangeness that "bestows Charms on a Monster, and makes even the Imperfections of Nature please us."[17] The admiration of something which has no links with nature, which is neither nature nor its representation, is dangerously close to malady or madness. In *The Spectator*, No. 44 Addison admits that "there is nothing which delights and terrifies our English Theatre so much as a Ghost, especially when he appears in a bloody Shirt,"[18] ascribing later this penchant for the supernatural to the fact that

> the *English* are naturally Fanciful, and very often disposed by that gloominess and Melancholly of Temper, which is so frequent in our Nation, to many wild Notions and Visions, to which others are so liable.[19]

---

[15] M. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization. A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. R. Howard (New York: Vintage Books 1973), p. 99.

[16] Quoted in M. Foucault, *Madness...*, pp. 99—100.

[17] *Addison and Steele. Selections...*, p. 210.

[18] Ibid., p. 91.

[19] Ibid., p. 215.

It is, as it seems, another way of saying that at least a part of the English people, those endowed with the "Vulgar" kind of imagination,[20] those who are not capable of receiving pleasure offered by nature, have gone mad (the idea which Pope much less politely explores in *The Dunciad*).

"Madness," according to Michel Foucault, "will begin only in the act which gives the value of truth to the image. [...] Madness is thus beyond imagination, and yet it is profoundly rooted in it; for it consists merely in allowing the image a spontaneous value, total and absolute truth."[21] In Addison's reading, admiration of ghosts and spirits is productive of the spheres which are severed from the natural world but still endowed with some reality. In *The Spectator*, No. 215 he asks the following question, or at least, writes a sentence which ends with a question mark:

> We are pleased with surveying the different Habits and Behaviours of Foreign Countries, how much more must we be delighted and surprised when we are lead, as it were, into a new Creation, and see the Persons and Manners of another Species?[22]

In other words, Addison seems to be asking here if it is possible to have an access to another world populated by "another species" in the way one can travel and admire other, mundane, countries. If so, then the pleasures of visiting the alternative worlds should be even greater. If one (unlike "men of cold fancies and Philosophical Dispositions" who object to this kind of poetry) argues that "there are many intellectual Beings in the World besides ourselves, and several species of spirits,"[23] the pleasures he gains by admiring their images is but a delusion.

There is one more aspect to this possibility of there being another natural world besides the real one. This possibility actually makes the already mentioned province of "the whole Circle of Nature" confined and limited to its own species thus making it finite and restrained by itself. Things strange and uncommon can be simply classified as belonging to another species, equally confined to their own world, and thus domesticated and, as it were, naturalized in it. Then, there would be nothing uncommon within the uncommon and the really sublime pleasures of imagination would be, in fact, unthinkable. There would be no space for infinity in such a world and the eye of the beholder would perceive already classified objects none of which could in fact be strange or surprising.

---

[20] Cf. ibid., p. 207.

[21] M. Foucault, *Madness...*, p. 94.

[22] *Addison and...* (R. J. Allen, ed.), p. 215.

[23] Ibid., p. 214.

Paradoxically, however, the very notion of the "whole Circle of Nature" has some sort of confinement inscribed within it. Nature is total, complete and, in fact "methodiz'd," as Pope would have it, by the rules governing geometry. Nature is thus available to both observation and speculation. As regards observation, pleasures of imagination which arise from "the actual View and Survey [...] all proceed from the Sight of what is *Great, Uncommon,* or *Beautiful.*"[24] Spheres of infinity do not quite belong to the observable categories in Addison because the latter must always be whole and complete.

> *By Greatness,* I do not only mean the Bulk of any single Object, but the Largeness of a whole View, considered as one entire Piece. Such are the Prospects of an open Champian Country, a vast uncultivated Desert, of huge Heaps of Mountains, high Rocks and precipices, or a wide Expanse of Waters [...] Our imagination loves to be filled with an object, or to grasp at any thing that is too big for its capacity. We are flung into a pleasing astonishment at such *unbounded* [italics added] views, and feel a delightful Stillness and Amazement in the soul at the Apprehension of them.[25]

The idea of an unbounded whole is obviously paradoxical, and Addison's greatness which amazes is the greatness of an enlarged whole, a whole which is somehow contained within itself and yet capable of expanding. Addison's gesture of the erasure of the alternative "orders" of things is the gesture which is necessary in order to establish an ontological security of position (R.D. Laing's term), a position from which whatever is perceived is ontologically real and thus epistemologically available to human understanding. A whole which has no limits, which is unbounded cannot be an entity, an object but it is rhetorically presented as an entity in order to secure the substantiality of the perceived world, its integrity and presence. "To the eighteenth century," says Georges Poulet,

> [...] existence seems constantly being saved from nonbeing. [...] The preservation of the universe and of the creature no longer is directly conceived as the immediate effect of the creative action. The latter is relegated to a remote past.[26]

If the belief in real existence of other worlds is madness, a belief in nonexistence, then it is necessary to save the being of the world as an infinity, a boundless, but still natural, entity whose exploration by human reason is thinkable despite its "vasteness." The eighteenth-century world is "constantly being saved" because, once created, it might go mad, and thus become nonexistent for us as reality, a suspicion which was the central mechanism of Descartes' fear. The complete separation of madness from reason, and thus

---

[24] Ibid., p. 209.

[25] Ibid.

[26] G. Poulet, *Studies* (London 1967), p. 19.

also the institutional exclusion of madness in the classical age, is a necessary defensive gesture which saves the ontological of the world's existence. Addison achieves this separation by presenting the world as both whole and infinite, as a space in which there is simply no room for unreason because the very idea of something whole and infinite is the geometrical idea of "Pascal's fearful sphere," as Borges phrased it, whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere. Yet the struggle cannot be thus simply ended, because the paradox of the fear of delirious madness is that we can never be certain whether the reasonable is not, in fact, its own adversary. "What characterizes madness," writes Shoshana Felman, "is thus not simply blindness, but a blindness blind to itself, to the point of necessarily entailing an *illusion* of *reason*."[27]

Things which necessitate a reasonable approach to and an explanation of the sublime, things which are great, uncommon, or beautiful do have a space in the boundlessly whole world and their labelling as strange or uncommon is a result of the inadequacy of our epistemological tools. A theorization of the sublime is thus a necessary step whose task is, paradoxically, a desublimation of the sublime, the domestication of the uncommon, putting the uncommon within the tabulated space of the classical classes and categories. This is made quite plain, as we shall see, in Burke's *Enquiry*, but it is also in quite an interesting way, hidden in Addison's essays.

One of Addison's overt claims is that human mind does not really like enclosures, restrictions or any other kinds of confinement:

> The Mind of Man naturally hates every thing that looks like Restraint upon it, and is apt to fancy it self under a sort of Confinement, when the Sight is pent up in a narrow Compass, and shortened on every side by the neighbourhood of Walls and Mountains. On the contrary, a spacious Horizon is an Image of Liberty, where the Eye has Room to range abroad, to expatiate at large in the Immensity of its Views, and lose it self amidst the Variety of Objects that offer themselves to its Observations.[28]

Ranging abroad is thus a natural tendency of both human mind and eye. Going outside certain limits or borders, transgressing them, is an expression of human drive to liberty. Though Addison seems to be talking about landscape, a certain economy seems to be at stake here as well. The unbounded circle of natural constitutes a certain domain of man, a space which is properly human although amazingly great or immense. The perceived objects "offer themselves" to the eye of the beholder as yet strange and not domesticated (for this reason the eye loses itself), but the idea of their being already subjected

---

[27] S. Felman, *Writing and Madness (Literature/Philosophy/Psychoanalysis)* (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press 1985), p. 36.

[28] *Addison and...* (R.J. Allen, ed.), p. 209.

to human gaze is already inscribed in the word "offer." One might actually suspect that the pleasures of human imagination consist here in the promise of eventual satisfaction of one's desire not so much to be free, as to eventually organize the vast, unfamiliar space one is facing.

Moreover, as I have mentioned earlier, the real pleasures of imagination can be experienced only by those whose minds are already elevated enough to be able to conceive of them. The vulgar ones, those minds which are incapable of admiring what is really natural, must do with ghosts and spirits. The spheres of the infinite are not accessible to everyone, and Addison seems to be quite plain as regards this:

> A Man of a Polite Imagination is let into a great many Pleasures, that the Vulgar are not capable of receiving. He can converse with a picture, and find an agreeable Companion in a Statue. He meets with a secret Refreshment in a Description, and often feels a greater Satisfaction in the Prospect of Fields and Meadows, than another does in the Possession. It gives him, indeed, a kind of Property in every thing he sees, and makes the most rude uncultivated Parts of Nature administer to his pleasures.[29]

There seems to be no difference for Addison between "receiving" and "perceiving" and there is quite evidently some link between Addison's economy and epistemology. "Polite Imagination" only receives more, it does not take anything. Just as in the previous fragment, though the word is not mentioned, pleasures hidden in things "offer" themselves to the polite imagination rather than to the vulgar kind of fancy. The pleasures are quite explicitly compared to the pleasure of possessing here, and one endowed with the polite imagination (mentally) possesses more, because he possesses such things as are without any properties of property to the vulgar eye. The situation is similar to that of Gonzalo who desires to possess Prospero's island (on which others see nothing to possess) and become its ruler simultaneously declaring that there would be no rulers in his dominion. Even the most uncultivated parts of nature show some tendency to be already "cultural" and actually want some administration on the part of the more polite pleasures. This kind of "propriation" by the polite imagination is rhetorically rendered as disinterested — disinterested because mental and aesthetic rather than economic and political. Polite imagination gives one the ability to look "upon the World, as it were, in another Light" and to discover "in it a Multitude of Charms, that conceal themselves from the generality of Mankind."[30]

---

[29] Ibid., p. 207.
[30] Ibid.

Daniel Cottom reads the remaining minority of mankind as aristocracy. What is at stake in the postulate of objective observation of things, he observes, and of seeing in them the properties others do not see, is the disguise of the realities of social organization

> in the form of a mental principle. That is to say, the claim of disinterest is only made possible because those objects which are regarded by the *Spectator* can be said to already belong to him, in spirit if not in actuality.[31]

Putting it very bluntly, there are those who are more sublimated and see more, and those who see less — the vulgar. Moreover, those who see more, see the world disinterestedly, "with no petty desires which might taint their judgement,"[32] and thus can be those who are naturally disposed to guide others. The possession of the deeper insight into nature is in a sense an "involuntary possession" (Cottom's term) of things which naturally offer themselves to those endowed with the second nature, with the nature which is as it were inherited. This second nature is, for Rousseau, the first, original nature which has somehow been forgotten, obscured and repressed by custom:

> The more we distance ourselves from the state of nature, the more we lose our natural tastes; or rather habit makes us a second nature which we substitute for the first to such an extent that no one knows that first nature anymore.[33]

The "no one" Rousseau is talking about is, of course, not the "we" that sees how "our natural tastes" are lost, the fact which posits Rousseau as a person capable of educating Emile, of teaching him naturally to see something which, provided he is endowed with the capability of seeing it, he will naturally see anyway, like Rousseau. Hence the paradox of the idea of education. Since the knowledge of nature is the matter of possessing the primary, natural tastes rather than the matter of work, then education, Daniel Cottom notices, "must be brought to the point of artlessness just as art must be refined to the point where it appears so natural that it aids in discovering the art of nature."[34]

Addison's ability to see the world "in another light" is also a natural, innocent (i.e. disinterested) pleasure restricted to those "but very few who

---

[31] D. Cottom, "Taste and the Civilized Imagination," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, XXXIX/4 (1981 Summer), p. 371.

[32] Ibid.

[33] J.-J. Rousseau, *Emile, Oeuvres complètes* (Paris 1919), 4: 407—408, quoted in D. Cottom, "Taste and...," p. 379.

[34] D. Cottom, "Taste and...," p. 373.

know how to be idle and innocent."[35] Such pleasures of imagination are experienced without any labour or effort, they are actually "awakened"[36] and, compared to the pleasures of understanding, they are actually even healthier:

> We might here add, that the Pleasures of the Fancy are more conductive to Health, than those of the Understanding, which are worked out by Dint of Thinking, and attended with too violent a Labour of the Brain. Delightful scenes [...] not only serve to clear and brighten the Imagination, but are able to disperse Grief and Melancholy, and to set the Animal Spirits in pleasing and agreeable Motions.[37]

What is great, uncommon, or beautiful brings the human mind to a state of mental equilibrium and purifies it of everything that might be spoilt by the common labour of the brain, by habit or superstition. An affinity with Aristotle's notion of *kátharsis* as a method of curing madness and melancholy by means of purgatives seems to be discernible here.[38] In the light of Addison's clear-cut distinction between the polite and the vulgar kinds of imagination, those who perceive the world in the vulgar manner are generally unhealthy, and incurably so, because they are not capable of elevating their imagination and feel liberated at the apprehension of "Unbounded views" and other charms concealed from "the generality of Mankind." Yet Addison's notorious use of "we" works to the effect that the whole society and the generalized human nature are at stake here. What might be now termed the sphere of the aesthetic is thus presented as a sphere which is conductive to healthy existence, both of the body and that of the mind. This sphere as the sphere where the mind, at least momentarily, is liberated from everything that restrains it is actually also a threatening sphere in which the possibility of one's total dispersion in unrestrained liberty is inscribed. One can purify oneself only to a degree which is pleasing and agreeable. For this reason there must exist a sphere of transgression, the liberating sphere of the spacious prospects and horizons, but, simultaneously, just as the idea of an unbounded whole, it must be somehow totalized and thus confined. The lack of such a sphere would deprive us of the possibility of purifying ourselves, of "brightening our imagination," it would be a state of constant, unhealthy mental constipation without the possibility, or even space, for release. Addison, of course, does not use the term "constipation" in this respect, but the more ambiguous

---

[35] *Addison and...* (R. J. Allen, ed.)., pp. 207—208.

[36] Cf. ibid., p. 208.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Cf. H. Podbielski, *Introduction* to: Arystoteles, *Poetyka* (Wrocław: Ossolineum 1983), p. lxiv.

word "satiety" which brings to mind both fullness and negative excess, satisfaction and dissatisfaction at the same time:

> We are indeed so often conversant with one Set of Objects, and tired out with so many repeated Shows of the same Things, that whatever is *new* or *uncommon* contributes a little to vary human Life, and to divert out Minds, for a while, with the Strangeness of its Appearance: it serves us for a Kind of Refreshment, and takes off from that Satiety we are apt to complain of in our usual and ordinary Entertainments.[39]

Human life, both social and individual, as it seems, is thus organized upon two planes which are actually one; the plane of ordinary, repeated shows, and the relieving or liberating plane of the new and the uncommon. The liberating plane, which is quite evidently the sphere of the aesthetic, is the sphere which rhetorically inscribes freedom within the individuals who otherwise are bound to repeat one and the same lowly necessities. Where there is no room for freedom, there is no room for the free individual, but since this individual has to freely participate in the social bond, those freedoms must be somehow bounded as well. Hence the necessity of an unconfined confinement of sorts; unconfined because productive of freedom, and confined for two reasons — as to restrict the freedom to the "demands" of the society so as it does not disperse in anarchy, and as to keep the already discussed realms of ghost and spirits as products of ill imagination away from the epistemologically safe sphere of reason which, paradoxically, must be presented as unconfined and natural because within the idea of the limit or border there is quite reasonably inscribed the possibility of the existence of different realms and spheres. Addison does not deny the necessity of common, repeated, ordinary actions dictated by custom and law (which he anyway somehow elevates to "entertainments") which are overtly restricted and restrictive and are thus felt as "satiety" which is necessary to biological existence but which is also something we desire to relieve. This sphere can be controlled by the restrictive apparatus of both the law and the "court of reason" which, classifying, also restricts. Since the human mind, as we have seen, "naturally hates" restrictions, this unnatural necessity is extended (and thus as it were naturalized) in Addison to the aesthetic, unrestricted pleasures of imagination which freely liberate us "for a while," and contribute "a little" to vary our life. The questions "for how long" and "to what extent" becomes thus the key question to be answered, and the question which cannot be actually answered, by the eighteenth-century philosophers of the mind; the question which leads Hume, for instance, to "an abysmal plunge into scepticism,"

---

[39] Ibid., p. 412.

as Terry Eagleton phrases it.[40] The question must be answered because, if left unrestricted, the duration and scope of the pleasure of freedom would dismantle the social system and translate it into a "libidinal" drive leading towards self-destruction. The question cannot be answered, however, because such an answer would necessarily have to be restrictive, it would have to impose a limit upon our pleasures and thus deny the liberty necessary for the existence of the very idea of the social contract of which the notion of the already mentioned oxymoron of "free bondage" is constitutive and of which, according to Eagleton, "the aesthetic is a vital symbol."[41]

Though Addison's essays on the pleasures of the imagination do not present any explicit vision of state or society it is exactly this foregrounding of the aesthetic which "politicizes" his text. The aesthetic is posited as the sphere where some natural form of social coexistence is thinkable. In order to live naturally in the state with no restrictions which one naturally hates one has to restrict oneself to those pleasures which are not excessive:

> A Man should endeavour, therefore, to make the Sphere of his innocent Pleasures as wide as possible, that he may retire into them with Safety, and find in them such a Satisfaction as a wise Man would not blush to take.[42]

Addison offers us a sphere of retirement from the restrictions of reason as an extension, as a territory which leaves the realm of reason intact but whose very necessity renders it as insufficient. Though in the previously quoted fragment he uses the phrases "a little" and for "a while," here we learn that the sphere of pleasures should be as wide as possible but not boundless because restricted to those pleasures which are "innocent," to the pleasures which can be morally judged as virtuous. Here Addison touches once again upon the question of the compatibility of individual, subjective, and diversified opinions and tastes and the demands of reason whose working is rooted in homogeneity and stability of categories. Enslaved by reason one has to purify oneself of it by means of some vagaries of innocent pleasures which cannot be confined to some stable, empirically measurable categories. Yet the pleasures must remain innocent and virtuous and the measurement of whether they are excessive or not offered by Addison does not come from any reasonable explanations or philosophical speculation but it comes from the body as a blush, as a natural, bodily reaction which by itself informs one that he has transgressed. It is our sensibility alone which is capable of withholding our desire, of distinguishing between innocence and vice, of actually making us pure from both the displeasing confines of reason and the tempting huge

---

[40] T. Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1990), p. 47.
[41] Ibid., p. 56.
[42] *Addison and...* (R.J. Allen, ed.), p. 208.

spaces of infinite, pleasurable prospects which simultaneously terrify us, also naturally, and thus also warn us that infinity is not the proper, naturally proper, sphere of man.

Terry Eagleton suggests that the British eighteenth-century moralists celebrate 'moral sense' as a category which "allows us to experience right and wrong with all the swiftness of the senses, and so lays the groundwork for a social cohesion more deeply felt than any mere rational totality. If the moral values which govern social life are as self-evident as the taste of peaches, a good deal of disruptive wrangling can be dispensed with."[43] Since reason, as Descartes proved, leads mainly to doubt and to an equally doubtful certainty of one's existence in thinking then, granted that we exist, we should try to find the certainty as to other spheres of our life somewhere else, outside reason, without, of course, completely denying it. In addition to our reasonable certainty of being we must also be "beautiful" — agreeable, innocent, harmonious, good, virtuous — aesthetically ethical, as it were. Addison, of course, does not use the term aesthetics in his writings as the term was verbalized by Alexander Baumgarten in *Aesthetica* in 1750. Yet it is exactly the sphere of the later aesthetics in the sense of the whole sphere of human perceptions and sensations (*aisthesis*)[44] that Addison seems to be suggesting as a region of our exploration.

The sphere of innocent pleasures with which he supplements the speculative ways of reason is rendered as the sphere of safety in the above fragment because security is alien to reason not only as a feeling, a sensation but also because the reasonable speculation is productive of such a kind of terror which can hardly be modified by any "positive" adjective of the type "pleasing." A pleasing horror is pleasing exactly for the reason (though this last word seems to be quite wrong in this context) that it naturally warns us, like a blush, against any attempt at our full identification with a vast, great, novel or unusual prospect. Addison uses the adjective "pleasing" as an indirect modifier of "speculation" only in the case when he tries to compare the sphere of the imagination with the sphere of reason as regards infinity: "Such wide and undetermined Prospects are as Pleasing to the Fancy, as the Speculations of Eternity or Infinitude are to the Understanding."[45] This however seems to be a gesture enforced by the structure of the sentence rather than an attempt to endow reasonable understanding with the ability to feel. What seems to be at stake is that reason and understanding can be sources of pleasure only when looked upon as aesthetic objects in themselves, as some mental landscapes offered to the politely imaginative eye. Writing about those

---

[43] T. Eagleton, *The Ideology...*, p. 34.

[44] Cf. ibid., p. 13.

[45] *Addison and...* (R. J. Allen, ed.), pp. 209—210.

writers who, unlike those who deal with poetry and fiction but are "obliged to follow Nature more closely" (historians, natural philosophers, travellers, geographers) Addison gives preference to those who do not reveal reality at a stroke but to those who keep us "in a pleasing Suspense."[46] In this case he is writing about a historian thus supplementing the demand of the factographic veracity of his writing with a demand for an aesthetic dimension of the historical text, with the demand to delay the revelation of truth for the sake of the pleasure of the imagination. Livy is given as an example of the historian who "excelled all who went before him" exactly for the reason that he "describes every thing in so lively a Manner, that his whole History is an admirable Picture."[47]

Thus having aestheticized history Addison goes on to discussing the authors of "the New Philosophy," whose writings also gratify and enlarge the imagination

> whether we consider their Theories of the Earth or Heavens, the Discoveries they have made by Glasses, or any other Contemplations of Nature. We are not a little pleased to find every green Leaf swarm with Millions of Animals, that at their largest Growth are not visible to the naked Eye.[48]

The microscope is thus also a "macroscope" of sorts which in addition to its function of discovering things we cannot see, also serves as a device producing the aesthetic pleasure by opening up new visions of infinity, greatness and strangeness constitutive of the pleasing astonishment. The infinity as an idea rather than a great, boundless prospect, the infinity as a product of thinking and reason is unwelcome to the imaginative eye because it can by no means be rendered as a picture or an image.

> The Understanding, indeed, opens an infinite Space on every side of us, but the imagination, after a few faint efforts, is immediately at a stand, and finds her self swallowed up in the Immensity of the Void that surrounds it: Our reason can pursue a Particle of Matter through an infinite variety of Divisions, but the Fancy soon loses sight of it, and feels in it self a kind of Chasm, that wants to be filled with Matter of a more sensible Bulk.[49]

What is striking in this fragment is the presentation of the imagination both as feminine ("finds her self") and neuter ("in it self"). Paraphrasing Nietzsche's idea of experience as the feminine, Terry Eagleton claims that while the German moral aestheticians, like Baumgarten, subject this "treacherous

---

[46] Ibid., p. 216.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid., p. 217.
[49] Ibid., pp. 218—219.

terrain" (of the feminine) to reason, the "British moral sense thinkers follow a more liberal path: the feminine, in the form of pure intuition, is a surer guide to moral truth than the masculine cult of calculative reason."[50] Since such intuitions are in fact the necessary elements of our agreeable, social co-existence, they cannot be entirely left upon the treacherous terrain of the feminine and their link with the "masculine regime of Reason" must be retained though the intuitions themselves are "too sublime for rational decipherment. The feminine is thus no more than a passage or mode of access to the masculine regime of Reason, whose sway [...] remains largely unchallenged in most moral sense philosophy."[51]

Addison's, say, androgynous imagination is rendered as defective because it cannot cope with the immensity of the productions of reason. It is actually reason which is endowed with the potentiality of creating the sublime by itself, of opening vistas hardly penetrable to the imagination. Infinity is not sensibly perceptible and in contact with the conceptual infinity there arise two kinds of nothingness in Addison: the void into which imagination plunges, by which it is "swallowed up," and the chasm which it feels within itself and which results from the loss of sight, from the inability to sensually perceive. The feminine as a passage to the reasonable Eagleton talks about seems to be interrupted in Addison, though there is a promise of the gap's being filled with some sort of sensibility which would enable the contact. The chasm within the imagination actually "wants" to be filled with sensibility and this natural want, probably the only feeling which the imagination transformed into a gaping chasm is capable of feeling, is the possibility of the eventual reconciliation of reason with sensibility. The sublime as the infinite and unbounded is thus relegated to the sphere of reason and the imperfect imagination quite literally lags behind it. Interestingly, Addison hypothesizes that it is not the spiritual constitution of man that is responsible for the imperfection of imagination but its "conjunction with the Body":

> It is possible this Defect of Imagination may not be in the Soul it self, but as it acts in Conjunction with the Body. Perhaps there may not be room enough in the Brain for such a variety of Impressions, or the Animal Spirits may be incapable of figuring them in such a manner, as is necessary to excite so very large or very minute Ideas.[52]

The imperfections of human body are thus, probably, the obstacle on the way to reconciliation of reason with imagination which resides within the otherwise perfect soul. Without the obstructive intervention of the body both spheres

---

[50] T. Eagleton, *The Ideology...*, p. 49.

[51] Ibid.

[52] *Addison and...*, (R. J. Allen, ed.), p. 219.

are perfect and capable of harmonious coexistence. The body confines human mind to the narrow capacity of its brain, though it cannot confine the feeling of the natural "want" of unconfinement. What is left to us constitutes a predicament which has to contradict Addison's dislike for supernatural creatures because the perfection can only be achieved outside the body, without the body's mediation, or the body has to grow large enough as to be able to be filled with infinity. This, while being impossible in this world, might be possible in another:

> [...] we may well suppose that Beings of a higher Nature very much excel us in this respect, as it is probable the Soul of Man will be infinitely more perfect hereafter in this Faculty, as well as in all the rest; insomuch that, perhaps, the Imagination will be able to keep Pace with the Understanding, and form in it self distinct Ideas of all the different Modes and Quantities of Space.[53]

In order that our sensibility keeps pace with the prospects offered us by reason we have to elevate ourselves to another level of existence outside or beyond the body. Only then can the ideas of infinity harmoniously coexist with our imagination. Or, perhaps, not so much coexist as become identical. The sublime feeling of delightful horror we experience in the face of great and uncommon things is but a hint, a symptom of the pleasures which will not be horrible at all once we have become souls or angels, for instance. Confined by the imperfection of our bodies we are bound to be restrained despite our natural compulsion to transgress, despite our natural hatred of restraint discussed above. Or, like Clarissa Harlowe, we have to open ourselves up to infinity and die in order to get married with the true order of things, constantly writing letters denouncing this world on our own coffin used as a desk. For the living, the sublime is always away, elsewhere, in the sphere of sensibility inaccessible to senses, to souls. The sublime, hardly mentioned in Addison, let us repeat, is, in Addison, yet another sphere of ghosts and spirits, the sphere "of a higher Nature" which is both life and death, of a present-absence which is, however paradoxically, the only sphere where reason can meet imagination in Addison. The sublime turns out to be the inaccessible sphere of divinity, the sphere which only testifies to the infinite grandeur of the Maker whom we cannot face, whom we cannot communicate with, but whose nature is glimpsed at in the spheres of infinity and in the very idea of the infinity which elevates the mind but which simultaneously stops it in its working, binds the mind to its own limitations. Living within the confines of the body and of the society we are bound to bound all unbounded wholes and live with the beautiful rather than with the sublime because beauty, despite the obstructive work of the body, has a direct access to our souls:

---

[53] Ibid.

> But there is nothing that makes its way more directly to the Soul than *Beauty*, which immediately diffuses a secret Satisfaction and Complacency through the Imagination, and gives a Finishing to any thing that is Great and Uncommon.[54]

Beauty is thus a finished infinity of sorts, a diminished Greatness and the Uncommon made common, social, agreeable, acceptable to everybody. Things great and uncommon are not beautiful in themselves, but they provide the ground for the existence of the beautiful as an object of shared, common admiration which consists in "finishing," in this faculty of our imagination which is free to "give a finishing" wherever it pleases provided that it gives the finishing. The "where" is of course the sphere of the individual freedom, the sphere of aesthetics, of tastes, pleasures and agreeable agreements; the sensual sphere explored by the moral sense philosophers (like Hume, Smith, or Burke) as the sphere of exchange of feelings and sympathies which "give a Finishing" to the society of free individuals so as it does not fall to pieces.

---

[54] Ibid., p. 211.

III

The Lesson of Feeling (On "Man a Machine" and the Dilemmas of Hum(e)an Nature)

> In short, for an action to be "moral," it must not be reducible to an act or a series of acts conforming to a rule, a law, or a value. Of course all moral action involves a relationship with reality in which it is carried out, and a relationship with the self. The latter is not simply "self-awarenes" but self-formation as an "ethical subject," a process in which the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the percept he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal.
>
> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*

"We were not originally made to be learned"; says La Mettrie in his *Man a Machine* (1747), and

> we have become so perhaps by a sort of abuse of our organic faculties, and at the expense of the State, which nourishes a host of loafers whom vanity has adorned with the name of "philosophers." Nature created us all solely to be happy — yes, all, from the crawling worm to the eagle that soars out of sight in the clouds. That is why she has given all animals some share of natural law, a share of greater or less delicacy according to the needs of each animal's organs when in good condition.[1]

[1] J.O. La Mettrie, "Man a Machine," in *Les philosophes*, N.L. Torrey, ed. (New York: Capricorn Books 1980), p. 176.

All creatures have thus their own pleasures which make them happy, from the lowliest worm to the most sublime and invisible eagles. There must thus also exist species of happiness appropriate for each of the natural species, with the important precaution, of course, that the creature is in good condition, that is to say, normal, and does not want to partake of the pleasures of others. Learning is, according to La Mettrie, not only a secondary, artificial product but actually a distortion of nature, a parasite upon the body of nature upon which philosophers feed and create systems supporting the existence of the institution of state. The natural laws in which we all have share are thus not theoretical constructs of human art and the only proof of their existence is feeling which the unphilosophical pen of La Mettrie identifies with law:

> Now how shall we define natural law? It is a feeling which teaches us what we should not do, because we would not wish it to be done to us.[2]

It thus turns out that a dint of learning is a natural thing though the teacher is not a reasonable philosopher, for instance, but, rather, some feeling of discomfort as regards ourselves. Rousseau's natural teacher of Emile and "La plus sublime vertu" of not doing harm to others quite evidently reverberates in La Mettrie. Feeling is not a forbearing kind of teacher because his activity consists mainly in threatening us from doing wrong things by positing them as wrong to ourselves. We are thus naturally both egoistic and egocentric, as it is only for our own pleasure and comfort that we are good to others, and it is for the constant fear of the loss of that comfort that the society can naturally function. "Would I dare add," La Mettrie goes on, "[...] that this feeling seems to me but a kind of fear or dread, as salutary to the race as to the individual?" He, of course, dares and says that we love purses as well as lives of others "only to save our won possessions, our honor, and our own lives."[3]

The lesson of feeling requires an aid of threat, some kind of presentation of unhappiness which, simultaneously, does not affect our happiness for which we have been made by nature. We exist only for pleasure, like Freud's babies, and philosophical and theological speculations are products which cheat us with the delusion of finding some reason for human existence. We exist "like mushrooms that appear from one day to the next" and "who knows whether the reason for man's existence is not simply the fact that he exists?"[4] Reason is also a part of our nature but it has become denaturalized in the hands of philosophers who have created a separate world of reason and via institutionalization and education imposed upon us various systems

[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., p. 177.

only in order to make us blind to the fact that we exist only in order to exist. Relying on reason alone is misleading because reason is productive of abstractions which have little to do with one's natural feelings. La Mettrie's ideas are not abstract, and the way he achieved his nonphilosophical system (which is not a system but truth alone: "Such is my system, or rather the truth") was by uniting thought and feeling, reason and senses, by naturalizing reason, so to speak, bringing it back to the body. His work, probably *Man a Machine*,

> is not the work of prejudice, nor even of reason alone; I would have disdained a guide which I believe so untrustworthy, had not my senses held the torch, so to speak, and induced me to follow reason by lighting the way. Experience has thus spoken to me in behalf of reason; and in this way I have combined the two.[5]

Reason, if it is to be of any use, must be dark and silent, and the light and voice of truth come from the feeling body, from experience. In other words, the idea of natural law is not an idea as a product of reason but a formulation dictated by the sensual experience of that law. Since that law is governed by the fear of the loss of happiness, it must have been fear that taught La Mettrie what he should not do, be a philosopher, for instance, because philosophy harms by imposing unnatural, and hence unwelcome laws which direct and restrict our happiness.

The paradox seems to be that fear itself is not, I think, a pleasurable kind of feeling. In La Mettrie fear is, as it were, a constitutive outside of happiness which, in turn, without that fear, is a reduction to a mushroom, to existence in order to exists. On the other hand, fear is salutary to existence as a source of human activity for the preservation of happiness. Being happy actually consists in being afraid, in feeling fear and simultaneously keeping it away as not ours. In order that we are happy, there must exist some realm of unhappiness, of threat or danger, of theft, robbery and death. La Mettrie actually reads life and possessions as one and the same kind of happiness and thus posits death as a thief of life who lurks in the dark and forces us to be watchful of ourselves, or live, against death — not kill in order not to be killed. The fearful sphere of natural law is thus rendered as actually alien to us, unexplorable to those whose natural compulsion for happiness makes them naturally feel what is wrong and naturally incapable of doing it. Fear is thus, say, pleasurable or agreeable as productive of happiness. We are thus naturally happy and institutionalization of that happiness denaturalizes the natural law by positing it outside man and actually verbalizing the sphere of the intuitive fear thus making it into a prohibited object present and open for exploration.

---

[5] Ibid.

Natural fear of death restrains us from killing because the idea of killing is alien to the natural happiness of life. "Thou shalt not kill," as a verbalized law, posits an external legislator and an artificial threat of punishment instead of the natural fear of death as the guiding principle of human conduct. All civil laws are constructs of reason alone, created without the torch of the actual feeling and thus propagating various arbitrary values defining the spheres of human happiness from the outside. Life governed by the civil law is quite different from that in which the natural law is followed, the former being a learned kind of life, and the latter natural, intimately felt, and thus real. The former is the life of the State, the latter is the life of man:

> You see that natural law is nothing but an intimate feeling which belongs also to the imagination like all other feelings, thoughts included. Consequently it evidently does not presuppose education, revelation or legislator, unless we confuse it with civil laws, in the ridiculous fashion of the theologians.[6]

Man is thus a social creature in the way of a mushroom endowed with human feelings and he needs no teachers except himself to live and let live. Since his thoughts are also feelings (natural thoughts, of course), such a man of feeling will naturally withdraw from the spheres alien to him and will choose only this share of natural law which is proper to him, to his organs. Feelings which are not intimate, all abstract thoughts and values imposed by social codes are objects naturally alien to men and a really natural creature should locate them in the sphere productive of fear or dread to be both avoided and never practised. La Mettrie also locates "a supreme being" in the abstract sphere alien to the sphere of happiness and says that God's existence is "a theoretic truth with very little practical value."[7] All abstract ideas are alien to man and thus fearful and dangerous to him. They alienate man from man and traditional philosophy is something La Mettrie would not like to be done to him and what he himself does not do. It is through senses, through the body, through feelings which we find agreeable with ourselves that we can eventually understand our nature and not through abstract, metaphysical reasoning which, as not properly ours, as alien, is as fearful as pain, discomfort or death and which "can no more attain truth that frogs can fly."[8]

What is thus implicitly hinted at in La Mettrie's discourse is the idea of the truth of human nature as a secure totality of body and soul (like Blake, he accuses the philosophers like Descartes of recognizing and separating two distinct substances of body and soul in man) whose identity is confined to the coherent and 'cohering' individual feeling of security trough the rejection

---

[6] Ibid., p. 176.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid., p. 169.

of fear which negatively teaches us what is our nature, which teaches us our natural happiness. The natural law, the natural order, is actually inscribed within us as some fear-sensitive organ which warns us against the approaches of the Other. Hence the demand for the normal functioning of our senses. We all fear different things and find them disagreeable, but these differences are due to some bodily deficiencies which obstruct our imagination[9], and due to our ability to speak, to use language, which subjected us to its own rhetorical productions which we now take for the natural state of being.

> Words, languages, laws, sciences, and the fine arts, have come, and by them our rough diamond of a mind has been polished. Man has become trained in the same way as animals; he has become an author, as they become beasts of burden.[10]

The polished diamond of our minds might be artful, or even beautiful from the point of view of a thus polished, or educated man, but it is by no means natural. Through language we have become authors, slaves to linguistic constructions which constitute our contemporary knowledge which "blows up the balloon-like brains of our proud pedants" and which, for this reason, "is therefore a huge mass of words and figures."[11]

La Mettrie's natural fear makes him abhor all intellectual constructs as contrary to nature and the natural happiness which he propagates. The sphere of aesthetics, of the polished diamonds, is the through and through artificial sphere of what is in fact chaos and disorder, a "huge mass of words and figures," of abstract concepts which do not partake in what he calls happiness. We have been enslaved by that chaos while the only real order is that of natural laws and natural fears. It is thus only through experiencing, or practicing, nature that we can be happy, because only then is any kind of order available to us. He does not call that order beautiful since this word is already loaded with the negative connotations of polishing, but it is quite evidently opposed to the disorder of the order invented by the authors, by philosophers who create nothing but heaps of words about words, fearful landscapes of the mind which create other, alien, unnatural worlds, the sublime spheres of higher orders and higher beings, like God, of no practical value from the lowly point of view the natural being which knows which share of the natural law is proper to it.

It is thus impossible, and actually contradictory, to theorise the natural order without the distortion of philosophical abstractions. The "heap of words" constituting the body of *Man a Machine* is an object which cannot

---

[9] Cf. ibid., p. 172.

[10] Ibid., p. 175.

[11] Ibid.

communicate any truths regardless of La Mettrie's positive statement to the contrary ("Such is my system, or rather the truth"). Though didacticism is one of the things he abhors, his book actually teaches, though negatively, what is unnatural rather than states (an impossible thing in nature) what is natural. He thus writes as it were against the grain of his own nature and produces, or does, exactly what we (and he) "would not like to be done to us" and thus only negatively hints at there being some more agreeable possibility of being, an order whose order is natural, and hence probably different from what the artificial word "order" seems to be meaning.

La Mettrie's programme could thus be rightly called that of desublimation. If for Addison, as we have seen, the abstract productions of reason were still a part of human nature promising a development of imagination which is as yet incapable of pursuing them, La Mettrie renders them as enslaving, blinding and in fact, naturally, nonexistent in the natural sphere of happiness in which feeling with an admixture of reason constitute man. There is nothing aesthetic in 'man a machine,' nothing divine or infinite from the perspective of human happiness reduced to the pleasure of secure being, of security in general, in whose constant learning by fear our life, both individual and social actually consists. La Mettrie himself, however, is not a didacticist, he only shows the truth without any attempt to show us, or tell us, how to create a new society of natural beings. He only lays bare our nature, leaving the discovery of the actual laws of nature to the natural machines about which we have forgotten how to be. Yet the idea of human sociability is implicitly marked in the very principle of the natural law in which it is the comfort of **others** that constitutes our own comfort.

This idea of an absolutely free individual living for his own pleasures which are the pleasures of others was in a peculiar way developed by William Godwin in his idea of new society based on the principle of self-love (see chapter VI) in which eventually everyone becomes a self-made eternity. La Mettrie's sphere of sociability is the sphere of sensibility which, regardless of his criticism of rhetoricity, can only exist as an allegory of the society which he criticizes, an allegory of state and institutions without state and institutions, a theoretical construct whose actualization La Mettrie leaves to others, to other ourselves, but which is as equally verbal a construction as any other philosophical system he criticizes ("a huge mass of words and figures"). In the philosophers of feeling less sceptical as regards language than La Mettrie the sphere of interest seems to be quite similar to his, the difference being that the latter would use such terms as justice, state or law in a more positive sense thus suggesting a naturalization of the existing institutions rather than banning them as totally artificial and thus non-human.

It is exactly here, I think, that the necessity of such a notion as the sublime arises. In La Mettrie it exists only implicitly, just as the sphere of the natural

is also implicit in him. He does marry, as we have seen, thought and feeling, but he does so to the point where thought actually becomes feeling ("like all other feelings, thought included," let us repeat) and where the purely speculative sphere is denied any status of usefulness as a sphere beyond (above or away from) the properly human world, and whose proper effect upon our normal senses should be that of fear — a version of terror which for Burke, the theoretician of the sublime, is, as we shall see, the feeling coming from, say, elsewhere. The philosophers who take some kind of social reality for granted will read the nature hypothesized by La Mettrie as an object which can be expanded or extended to human understanding, a possibility presupposed and simultaneously denied in La Mettrie in the very notion of "natural order" whose "orderly" part is either to remain unexplained thus reducing us to mushrooms (which, I think, does not necessarily have to be unpleasant or very untrue), or reasonably explained at the cost of the naturalness of being.

It is because of this oxymoronic paradox that Hume, for instance, will read the very hypothesis of the purely natural state of nature exactly the other way round, and will accuse natural philosophers (as opposed to moral philosophers) of *extending* reason to the spheres of their own invention:

> [...] philosophers may, if they please, extend their reasoning to the suppos'd *state of nature*; provided they allow it to be a mere philosophical fiction, which never had, and never could have any reality.[12]

This notion of extension seems to be very important here. Extension entails a certain continuity, a prolongation in which some elements of the original form or object should be still discernible. Hume accuses natural philosophers of extending reasoning to the spheres which are discontinuous with reality, and thus endows the unreal with the possibility, however vain, of being explored by reason. Obviously not criticising La Mettrie (*Treatise* was published in 1740), Hume accuses natural philosophers of treating "affections and understanding" as two separable things simultaneously claiming that they are inseparable.[13] In other words, like Mettrie, natural philosophers postulate that there is reason in nature (natural order) simultaneously claiming that this reason is of a different order, of the natural order unavailable to man. Though La Mettrie overtly claims that he has joined reason and living experience, he actually produces an unreal world of an equally unreal nature claiming that human reason actually distorts natural order and leads it astray. Hume's demand of joining

---

[12] D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, L. A. Selby-Bigge, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1981), p. 493.

[13] Cf. ibid., p. 493.

affection and understanding is literally the same as that of La Mettrie, though it is the extension, the movement of affections that he, unlike La Mettrie, seems to be criticizing:

> Human nature being compos'd of two principal parts, which are requisite in all its actions, the affections and understanding; 'tis certain, that the blind motions of the former, without the direction of the latter, incapacitate men for society.[14]

Affections alone are thus blind drives comparable to Freud's subconscious and the nature propagated by the natural philosophers, even if it were not a fiction, would be but a chaotic movement of matter to no point, without a direction. Hence the necessity of pointing the direction by understanding which gives sight to the affections and thus makes man a social being who, moreover, sees himself as such. The "state of nature, therefore," Hume repeats, "is to be regarded as a mere fiction"[15] because nature without understanding is simply incapable of producing any "state" or to remain within any stable "state" without the guidance which shows it where to go. The phrase "state of nature" itself is thus a mere oxymoron which only contradicts itself. Hence the necessity of extending nature to reason, of inscribing nature within the understanding, a gesture exactly opposite to that of La Mettrie, but productive of very similar oxymoronic constructions. Nature becomes inscribed within the very idea of state and the "production" of "states" becomes a natural activity, be they states of mind or political states. It is for this reason that Hume can talk about "The *natural* obligation to justice"[16] without seeing that natural justice is also an oxymoron because it is justice on which the state is now naturally based. Our subjection to the law is thus a natural gesture of submission to the natural law of the state which in turn is based on the notion of property. In La Mettrie's natural order of things theft of property is mentioned as a source of displeasure and fear but already on the level of the political organization of the society which he simultaneously condemns as unnatural, and it is, as I have said, contradictory to his writing to positively state any particular natural laws without the risk of denaturalizing them. Hume, despite his relegation of the "state of nature" to the world of fiction does make an excursion to that world and finds a trace of property in somehow convoluted logic of the following statement:

> [...] tho' I assert, that in the *state of nature*, or that imaginary state, which preceded society, there be neither justice nor injustice, yet I assert not, that it was allowable, in such a state, to violate the property of others. I only maintain, that there was no

---

[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., p. 498

> such thing as property; and consequently cou'd be no such thing as justice or injustice.[17]

Hume simply cannot imagine a nature without properties, without the property of property which it was perhaps forbidden to violate, though it did not exist. Having made nature an understandable thing, having extended nature to understanding, Hume's understanding stops in its working (very much like Addison's imagination) in the face of the sphere where nobody knows who is who and hence what is whose. There is no state without justice, and though there is no justice in the imaginary world of nature, there still must be a justice which prohibits violation of property. The extension of nature to understanding is thus a gesture which represses the existence of the unnatural, a gesture which naturalizes and legitimizes all human creation simultaneously making all "natural creation" available to understanding.

This naturalization of understanding seems to be the source of Hume's dilemma concerning philosophy and, say, common life. The marriage of nature and understanding leads to the situation in which philosophical speculations, "the refined reasoning," about nature lead to total skepticism as to the eventual explanation of nature and actually turn against themselves. Reasoning alone "entirely subverts itself, and leaves the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition, either in philosophy or common life."[18] Yet the rejection of the refined reasoning is a contradiction because it is itself a maxim "built on the preceding reasoning" which is thus also contradictory. Hence Hume's well known statement:

> We have, therefore, no choice left but between a false reason and none at all. For my part, I know not what ought to be done in the present case. I can only observe what is commonly done; which is, that this difficulty is seldom or never thought of; and even where it has once been present to the mind, is quickly forgot, and leaves but a small impression behind it.[19]

Without reason we are left with nature alone, the fictitious nature of natural philosophers. Though Hume declares here that he does not know what should be done, he opts for false reason rather than for its absence because reasoning, however sceptical, is also a natural state of mind held in check by our natural dispositions, by passions and feelings. Philosophical speculations do not produce any final resolutions, do not explain the world, they actually "leave but small impressions" on us, but neither do breathing or eating leave any greater impressions. Reason is an extended nature which "by an absolute

---

[17] Ibid., p. 501.
[18] Ibid., p. 267.
[19] Ibid., p. 268.

and uncontrollable necessity has determin'd us to judge as well as to breathe and feel."[20] Reasoning is thus rendered as a bodily function similar to that of eating and feeling, and it is for this reason that Hume gives the absolute power of control over reason to what he terms "passions," to our mental dispositions, the dictates of our inner nature:

> We speak not strictly and philosophically when we talk of the combat of passions and reason. Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.[21]

It is thus not reason that reasons by itself and its only function is to follow the dictates of passions, of pleasures and desires which thus become the main current of sociability, "the very currency of society," as John Mullan puts it.[22] Here he quotes Hume from *Treatise*: "The passions are so contagious, that they pass with the greatest facility from one person to another, and produce correspondent movements in all human breasts."[23] *A Treatise of Human Nature* is thus a treatise about human passions which cannot be controlled and explained by any treatise whose reasoning is naturally necessary and yet uncontrollable (see above). Hume's *Treatise* is, as it were, the dictate of his human passions which he is obliged to judge because this compulsion to judgement, to 'refined' thinking is also a human passion.

The ambiguity of the title of Hume's book does not seem to be a coincidence here. Since nature let us repeat, "by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determin'd us to judge as well as to breathe and feel," it has also obliged everyone, every human nature to philosophize, to write or think treatises of their natures. If it were otherwise, then nature and passions would be under the rule of reason which could fully control and explain human nature to which it "should be" a slave.

This compulsion to philosophize is, however paradoxically, a compulsion to withdraw from philosophy at the same time, to return to "all the unthinking and unphilosophical kind of mankind, (that is, all of us, at one time or other)."[24] This apparent contradiction is the result of Hume's programmatic positive scepticism. We have to philosophize in order to remain sceptical, in order to be unphilosophical in the sense that we do not allow reason to dominate. "In all the incidents of life we ought still to preserve our scepticism," says Hume, even if the "incident of life" is the feeling or passion to the refined

---

[20] Ibid., p. 183.

[21] Ibid., p. 415.

[22] J. Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability. The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1988), p. 23.

[23] D. Hume, *A Treatise...*, p. 605.

[24] Ibid., p. 205.

reasoning and instruction of mankind, as he puts it. The naturalization of reason goes hand in hand with the naturalization of philosophy which is also a passion which heats Hume's brain[25] to the point of extreme scepticism at which he is ready "to reject all belief and reasoning" productive only of uncertainty and unanswerable questions.[26] Yet he does not quite reject them because passion tells him that philosophizing is pleasurable, and thus natural.

Hume thus philosophizes for two contradictory reasons. First, philosophy (refined reasoning) is natural and pleasurable. This, he declares, is the origin of his philosophy:

> These sentiments [to philosophize and instruct mankind] spring up naturally in my present disposition; and shou'd I endeavor to banish them, by attaching myself to any other business or diversion, I *feel* I shou'd be a loser in point of pleasure; and this is the origin of my philosophy.[27]

To abandon the sentiment to philosophize is thus rendered as contrary to Hume's feeling of pleasure, and actually an act of acceptance of the dictatorship of reason. Second, philosophy itself is inconclusive and productive of confusion ("[sceptical arguments] *admit of no answers and produce no conviction.* Their only effect is to cause that momentary amazement and irresolution and confusion, which is the result of scepticism.")[28] from which the mind will naturally withdraw anyway back to the state of the natural exchange of passions and feelings, to the sphere of the common pleasures. Since reason itself is incapable of "dispelling these clouds," the clouds of scepticism it itself produces, "nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium."[29] A philosopher who calls philosophy "melancholy and delirium" seems to be really away from the proper path, or furrow, of reason because what he suggests is that philosophy is a kind of madness. However, since Hume realizes that there is a dint of madness in philosophy, he himself is probably not properly mad. Simultaneously, as we have seen, he offers philosophizing as a sphere of some sophisticated feeling of pleasure, of passion which he will not completely renounce as such renunciation would actually postulate another mad world, a natural world without reason. Hence he posits philosophy as a curable

---

[25] Cf. ibid., p. 268.

[26] Ibid., pp. 268—269.

[27] D. Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, L. A. Selby-Bigge, ed. (Oxford 1978), *Enquiry* I, p. 155, quoted in J. Mullan, *Sentiment and...*, p. 20.

[28] Ibid., p. 271.

[29] Ibid., p. 269.

kind of (pleasurable) madness from which we can always withdraw to a more regulated world of more regulated passions of more common pleasures. For the nature that cures Hume of his "philosophical melancholy" is not some herb or cobweb that he applies to his heated imagination but the agreeable society which eating, drinking, talking and naturally functioning constitutes a home to which Hume can always securely return from the sublime, mad, inconclusive (and hence infinite) ways of his pleasurable speculations:

> I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and after three or four hour's amusement, I wou'd return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strain'd, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther.[30]

One who says "I'm going slightly mad," to quote Freddie Mercury a little out of context, is the one whose passions dictate his reason to philosophise, but who can always return to the womb of the social agreement of feelings and more mundane pleasures. One who believes that the productions of his reason or imagination are true, one who is not sceptical, is properly mad, properly lost to the society.

There are, as it seems, at least two kinds of madness in the eighteenth century and both of them actually verge on the border of the sublime and sociable (rather than beautiful). One such kind is Hume's madness of philosophy which he terms "melancholy" or "delirium," and which is socially acceptable as curable in the sense of the possibility of the return back to the normal from the nonexistent worlds, from the productions of "heated brain" which can be cooled down by agreeable conversation, games, or even proper diet. This delirium of philosophy, the sphere of the pleasurable, aesthetic feelings is seen as a pastime of sorts which we have to sceptically hold at a distance and of which, through scepticism, we can never be certain. It is thus also a fearful sphere as uncertainty which, in Hume's classification of passions, is productive either of fear or of hope.[31] In the case of the "refined reasoning" of philosophy, an identification with which is negative and actually evil, the feeling admixed to that of pleasure would be the fear of its inconclusiveness, of, exactly, its uncertainty. The delirious is thus both pleasurable and fearful (even in the sense La Mettrie used the term "fear"), agreeable and disagreeable, convenient and inconvenient, as opposed to the pure convenience of the social exchange and communication of certain, unquestionable, normal, unheated passions which are beautiful because "convenience is a beauty."[32] Philosophers are thus "slightly mad" because, at least occasionally, they

---

[30] Ibid., p. 265.
[31] Cf. ibid., p. 439.
[32] Ibid., p. 364.

take a voluntary leave of the convenient (beautiful) and drift away toward the "delirious" which as a mixture of pleasure and terror, at least according to Burke's divagations, can be provisionally termed the sublime, and only provisionally, since it exists, in Hume, Burke and elsewhere, only as the provisional domain of discernible chaos and infinity of madness against which we define our beautiful convenience of being at home, a possibility of return to what we are.

In the introductory Book I of his *Treatise* (1739—1740) Hume warns the reader that he departs from the world and presents philosophy as a lonesome journey into an immense, dangerous abyss ("before I launch out into those immense depth of philosophy, which lie before me, that forlorn solitude. [...] This sudden view of my danger strikes me with melancholy").[33] Yet, as we have seen, he departs from the social only to return to it and to see even more clearly that his journey was a reverie, an outburst of passion to philosophize about which he knows in advance that it is dangerous and against which he warns the reader in order that he or she does not alienate his or her mind from the world and keeps Hume's discourse, like he himself, sceptically, at a distance, observing the philosophical depth and insanity from the secure position of Book I. It is thus also a sane kind of insanity which, as in Addison, purifies us of insanity by offering it to us as a thereness which we can safely watch only from here.

Since the locus or source of passions is the human body the degree to which one follows the dictates of one's passions or sentiments depends on one's bodily constitution. Already in 1729 Nicolas Robinson, a physician, observed that what he called elevation of the mind depended on

> a System of Veins, Nerves, and Arteries. [...] All those sublime Flights and extatic Visions, that elevate the Soul above itself, whereby it towers above the Clouds [...] owe their rise due to Modulation of the Solids, to this happy structure of the Fibres.[34]

The system is to a certain extent elastic, and as long the constitution of the "happy structure of the Fibres" is not disrupted the sublime flights are still healthy. In the later eighteenth century the elasticity of the nervous system becomes the privilage of the "learned" who are generally seen as more sensitive than common people. John Mullan discusses this phenomenon more extensively in his *Sentiment and Sensibility*. He notices there that "the refined or studious hypochondriac" is a necessarily exceptional figure, deriving his "Distemper" from preoccupations and proclivities which remove him from

---

[33] D. Hume, *Treatise...*, p. 213.

[34] N. Robinson, *A New System of the Spleen, Vapours, and Hypochondric Melancholy* (London 1726), p. 229, quoted in J. Mullan, *Sentiment...*, p. 229.

"the common People" or "the ordinary state of human nature."[35] Yet such a "distempered" person still remains "normal" as long as his sublime flights, like Hume's, are only an extension of common sensitivity shared by, and constitutive of, common society, as long as the flights are the sphere of an aesthetic pleasure for those endowed with Addison's polite imagination. Melancholy is thus "a privileged affliction" caused by strong passions which simultaneously are marks of both moral and intellectual superiority.

One step from this kind of madness is something more dangerous, the other kind of madness which is not the madness of philosophy, but an unphilosophical, too excessive kind of madness, the madness proper which, John Mullan notices, "complicates perceptions of learned melancholy."[36] It is for the properly mad ones that Bedlam has been designed not so much as a place where madness was to be cured, as where it was to be kept in seclusion. The problem, as ever, was that of the border or limit between strong and too strong passions, the limit of transgression.

The most clear-cut distinction between the two comes from Dr. William Battie who distinguishes between "Original" madness and "Consequential Madness." The former "is solely owing to an internal disorder of the nervous substance" and thus incurable and the latter being only "distorted ab extra" and curable.[37] The latter kind is curable because its "ab extra" causes can be traced back to some originary emotion or passion communicated by the "patient." The "original" madness, on the other hand is, as it were, its own cause and such a madman perceives his flights of imagination as real and normal without any distance, he is "Persuaded of the Existence or of the appearance of any thing, which does not exist or does not actually appear to him."[38] Putting it bluntly, the madman proper (Battie actually uses the phrase "properly mad") does not know and cannot know that he is mad and thus cannot, unlike Hume, return from his expedition to dangerous depths of nonexistent worlds because he does not know that he has departed. The distinction still holds. For some reason, as R. D. Laing notices as if referring to La Mettrie,

> A man who says that men are machines may be a great scientist. A man who says he is a machine is 'depersonalized' in psychiatric jargon.[39]

---

[35] J. Mullan, *Sentiment...*, p. 213.

[36] Ibid., p. 209.

[37] W. Battie, *A Treatise on Madness* (London 1757), p. 20.

[38] Ibid. p. 6.

[39] R. D. Laing, *The Divided Self. An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (Penguin Books 1969), p. 12.

Hume's refined reasoning is perceived by Hume as an abnormal state of the mind which cures itself by itself and, unlike in the case of the proper madness, he does not identify himself fully with his theories. He describes himself in a letter "as suffering from 'the Disease of the Learned,' a synonym for the 'Distemper' which he calls 'the Vapors,' a 'Weakness... of Spirits' deriving from 'profound Reflections' which prompts him to take 'Anti-hysteric Pills' and long daily rides."[40] Various writings on this kind of still innocent distemper suggest that this distemper is most frequently the suffering of those who live a sedentary kind of life and "indulge themselves in too much study, continual Meditations," and the distemper is "very common among the *Literati*" and, interestingly, also among women whose "sypathethic sensibility" of organisms condemns them to the vapours.[41] Common people, or men, do not suffer from it because they lead a mobile kind of life, "active, laborious and mechanical."[42] As we have seen, instead of becoming active and laborious, Hume returns to the society to reconstruct himself as it were through common pleasures, and, in addition, takes some pills and "long daily rides."

"Escape from reality" is yet another Freddie Mercury line which can be quoted here again a little out of context. Since the mental journey into the speculative worlds of philosophising is a disease resulting from immobility and sedentary life of philosophers and literati, an escape into nature in various forms becomes a cure for all kinds of nervous disorder. Though Hume, as we have seen, theoretically praises common pleasures as agreeable and healthy for his heated imagination, he admits that instead of coming back to the common he'd rather take pills and rides. It is so, probably, because the agreeable, common life of common sentiments and passions turns out to be equally theoretical and, practically realised, would mean a displeasure of confronting the plain passions and ideas of those who have not been endowed with any kind of polite imagination, with the mob which in order to become agreeable has to be first elevated, taught to philosophize and thus become capable of understanding their human natures. Hence another contradiction in Hume's enterprise. In order to see that speculative thinking and reason are misleading and to no point people have to share Hume's passion for it, and Hume's scepticism; hence his writing, Hume feels, let us repeat, should contribute "to the instruction of mankind." Within the society as it is, governed by prejudice, such a uniform choir of sensibility is unthinkable, and the real balance of one's mind can only be attained away from the reality of society, in contact

---

[40] J. Mullan, *Sentiment...*, p. 209.

[41] Cf. ibid., p. 209 and p. 220. (The quoted phrases come from *A Medical Dictionary* by R. James (London 1743—1745).

[42] Cf. ibid., p. 238.

with nature. Travel became both fashion and therapy in the second half of the eighteenth century, especially in England, "the prestigious cure for more serious distresses of the upper middle class," as Klaus Doerner puts it.[43] In the seventeenth century the status of travel was quite different, it was actually a cause of uneasiness, homesickness and illness frequently associated with the change of climate.[44] In the eighteenth-century England social life of the middle class moved from London to Bath:

> Pastoral life, outings, hunting, fishing, riding, gymnastics, took an aura of wholesome moderation, as did the English Garden, milk cures and other natural diets. Since the nerves were seen as vibrating, taut strings, music was also said to possess [...] healing powers [...]. The cathartic effect of water, linked since time immemorial with rebirth, became institutionalized: [...] Bath became a center of social life.[45]

The rich were going to the waters, the poor were frequently kept in tubs with cold water in Bedlam, a method still practiced in psychiatric institutions.

Doerner also supplements his long list of pleasurable activities with travel and grand tours. The task of all outings and travels practiced by the middle class was theoretically a therapeutic contact with one's own natural nature, with the "inner nature, the subjective truth about [oneself], via the harmony and innocence of virgin external nature," which should result, Doerner notices, in correspondence "to moral 'naturalness' which tempers the behaviour towards the norm."[46] Morality is thus inscribed within, say, outer nature, as a certain norm and theoretically wherever one goes out away from the city one should encounter a natural harmony against which he should measure his own temperament. One may also, of course, go to the waters, to Bath for instance, where the purity of nature is encountered in meeting the same people one met in London, but already purified by the waters and thus equally natural as green fields, meadows and hedges. Within the city limits one is constantly exposed to less agreeable visions of the less tempered feelings whose heated imaginations might be mistakenly taken for the norm. Since temperament and temperature are related terms, eighteenth-century wits, as Terry Castle notices, make a remarkable rhetorical use of the figures of thermometer and weatherglass:

---

[43] K. Doerner, *Madness and the Bourgeoise. A Social History of Insanity and Psychiatry*, trans. J. Neugroschel and J. Steinberg (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1981), p. 61.

[44] Cf. ibid., p. 60.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

> With their curious, seemingly animate capacity to "feel" alterations in the atmosphere, weatherglasses, as they [thermometers] were known in the seventeenth century, lent themselves from the start to metaphoric adaptation. In the hands of eighteenth-century wits, they became registers for measuring fanciful changes of all sort — fluctuations in sexual desire, physical or emotional excitement, religious enthusiasm, and so forth.[47]

Since already at the end of the seventeenth century thermometers became portable things, an idea that one could carry a thermometer and thus constantly check the temperature of one's passions, of once's mental "weather" or aura began to develop. Initially regarded as male instruments for measuring and tempering female "moodiness and susceptibility to hysteria," thermometers, towards the middle of the eighteenth century, "have come increasingly to be perceived as belonging to both sexes."[48] Hume's subjection of reason to passions resulting in the epistemological insecurity of identity, in its instability and uncertainty seems to be also an example of what Castle sees as the growing feminization of the male subject and the feminization of human nature itself in the second half of the eighteenth century.[49] Since human identity becomes a matter of negotiable sentiments and agreeable feelings with other members of the society, human nature becomes deprived of the central, underlying substance of the ontological security and begins to exist outside itself as it were. Frederic Bogel calls the Age of Sensibility the Age of Insubstantiality in which what is at stake "is not the mind's effort to know but the world's ability to be experienced."[50] The lack of center, of stability, existence to "no point" in the airy spheres of vapours traditionally associated with women and ridiculed in the peculiar genre of writing called "satires on women" flourishing in the seventeenth century[51], become the ontological predicament facing the later eighteenth-century thinkers and writers. Our existence has now to be empirically rediscovered from the outside, through experience, through shared feelings, and the sphere of interest changes from that of the discovery of the object of being to the exploration of becoming.

---

[47] T. Castle, "The Female Thermometer," *Representations*, No. 17 (1987 Winter), p. 2.

[48] Ibid., p. 13.

[49] Cf. ibid.

[50] F. V. Bogel, *Literature and Insubstantiality in Later Eighteenth-Century England* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1984), p. 4.

[51] Cf. "Satires on Women" (1682, 1687, 1691), *The Augustan Reprint Society* (Los Angeles: University of California 1976).

IV

That Ingenious Genius (On Men, Women and Gardens)

> HEDGES, appearing as such, are universally bad. They discover art in nature's province.
>
> (William Shenstone, *The Progress of Gardening*)

Hume's scepticism is, of course, only an implicit acknowledgment of the feminization of human nature, which concept is a product of post-structuralist sensitivity to gender depression. This acknowledgment of one's instability, Hume's embracing of uncertainty, is, according to Bogel, the extreme expression of the experience of insubstantiality:

> Few, perhaps, were as willing as Hume "to live with uncertainty, with no supernatural justifications, no complete explanations, no promise of permanent stability, with guides of merely probable validity," as Peter Gay puts it. But in adopting such a stance Hume was less an exception to the British thought of his time than the figure in whom certain tendencies of that thought found their purest and most complete version.[1]

As we have seen, however, Hume was not really so willing to constantly live with uncertainty and he clearly searched for some place of repose where the uncertainty could be forgotten leaving but little impression on the mind. He took pills, he "outed" as if trying to regain within himself the agreeable sympathy he propagated as the sphere where society is cemented.

---

[1] Ibid., p. 61. (Quotation from P. Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, vol. 1, *The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: Knopf 1966), pp. 418–419.

Hume's *Treatise* lists all the possible dangers and distractions of the mind as only potentially dangerous to those whose temper tells them where to stop and who thus lose contact with the reality of the social exchange of feelings, whose taste, another synonym of one's agreeable character, does not dictate to one what is good and what is bad, both at the table and in the way one lives. "In the eighteenth century," says Daniel Cottom, "'taste' is a metaphorical as well as an alphabetical anagram of 'state.'"[2] This is of course a pun, but in the context of the following statement from Schiller this pun seems to be very well justified:

> Taste alone brings harmony into society, because it gives harmony to the individual [...] only communication of the beautiful unites society, because it refers to that which is common to all.[3]

Hume talks about "a *right* or a *wrong taste* in morals,"[4] and if in Schiller politics and aesthetics are not really two different domains, Hume's *Treatise* makes ethical judgements a matter of an aesthetics as well. Taste and sympathy are actually equivalent terms in Hume as they make all sentiments of others "intimately present to us" which presence testifies to reason (and thus forces reason to affirm it) that a given sentiment is really common to all.[5] There is thus both uncertainty and certainty in Hume, an uncertainty which, though impossible to be overcome by philosophy, has to be kept in constant check on the level of aesthetical/ethical/political pleasures of social co-existence which Schiller sees as the communication of the beautiful.

The feminization of nature Terry Castle talks about verges thus on a certain gap or aporia which Hume's epistemology opens up. On the one hand there is the desire to dismiss reason and philosophy only because this philosophy, though somewhat absurd, as Eagleton phrases it, is at least "unlikely to topple the state."[6] Hence, on the other hand, there is enough reason within the agreeable state or society to hold in check not all passions, because these, at least in theory, control reason, but the extravagant, excessive passions to philosophize which are vain and which in effect turn against themselves in the propagation of a return to the however limited bonds of blind habits and fetters of reason. By an inescapable paradox the philosopher explores the regions which are only felt by the layperson simultaneously saying that those regions are in fact nonexistent products of his heated

---

[2] D. Cottom, "Taste and...," p. 377.

[3] F. Schiller, "Über die Asthetische Erziehung des Menschen in Einer Reihe von Briefen," in *Schillers Werke* (Weimar 1962), Vol. 20, pp. 410—411. Quoted in English in ibid., p. 377.

[4] D. Hume, *A Treatise...*, p. 547.

[5] Cf. ibid., p. 320.

[6] T. Eagleton, *The Ideology...*, p. 49.

imagination, of his trifling employment which does not really impress the mind. He does present the world he discovers in his explorations as uncertain, ambiguous, unreliable — as feminine, but he simultaneously guides others to stay where they are, preaches the active stability of being oneself, of practicing one's standard tastes and habits so that one does not go melancholic and does not have to take pills or go to Bath, for instance, which really would not house more than the few literati whose brains demand some cooling.

Interestingly, though not surprisingly, Hume's vision of philosophy, or philosophising (though the latter is Kant's term), could be attributed by means of most of the attributes used by authors of conduct books for women, a genre (the books, of course) extremely popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In *Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (1798), for instance, Thomas Gisborne includes the following list of "destabilizing traits" in women:

> The gay vivacity and quickness of imagination, so conspicuous among the qualities in which the superiority of women is acknowledged, have a tendency to lead to unsteadiness of mind; to fondness of novelty; to habits of frivolousness, and trifling employment; to dislike of sober application; to dislike graver studies.[7]

Woman is thus naturally equipped with a number of philosophical predispositions, with vivid and quick imagination which as such makes women superior, but which can be productive of useless speculations and thus the state of "the philosophical melancholy and delirium" Hume wrote about. Since the task of conduct books for women was to temper their frivolous characters, to keep their leisurely activities under strict control of men and to thus teach them the "Rudiments of Taste," some analogies to the philosophical discourse cannot go unnoticed. They are, I think, inscribed in the very epistemology of the Age of Sensibility as the rudiments of social co-existence in general. Man are to women what philosophers are to society as those endowed with both male and female natures and hence the ability to judge and actually dictate what should be the proper nature of both women and society. The feminine, as in Addison, turns out to be only a "passage to the masculine regime of reason" as the unwelcome excess "too sublime for rational decipherment,"[8] and in fact a dangerous outside of the safe, social co-habitation which in conduct books for women takes the form of literal domestication, of assigning women domestic duties and prohibiting them to work "outside." Since leisure and sedentary kind of life lead, as we have seen,

---

[7] T. Gisborne, *Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (London 1789), p. 54. Quoted in N. Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction. A Political History of the Novel* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1987), p. 99.

[8] T. Eagleton, *The Ideology...*, p. 49.

to melancholy and undue excitement of imagination, women busy themselves at home with "drawing, painting, modeling, making artificial flowers, embroidery, writing letters, reading," etc.,[9] while men work in order to provide for the household and thus are also kept busy and thus stop their minds from wandering too far. The unstable, uncertain sphere of heated imagination is reserved for philosophers who do their job on the margin of the society, away from it and simultaneously warn others against doing what they are doing; as if returning from the less mundane spheres back home and telling other people that they should be happy with what they have and are because they (philosophers) have not in fact been anywhere else. Since "we [philosophers] seek in vain for a standard, by which we can reconcile the contrary sentiments," since philosophical certainty has become the feminine uncertainty of feelings, imagination or intuition it is human confinement to what one already has and is, to one's (natural) properties and their exchange with others that can grant the smooth and stable functioning of the society. Hence what Eagleton terms "instinctual economizing of the mind"[10] which naturalizes the state and the idea of state in general simultaneously denaturalizing everything alien to it, everything we feel disagreeable to our, literally, state of nature, denaturalizing nature itself.

This latter denaturalization can be observed in various writings on landscape gardening extremely fashionable in the eighteenth century. It is already hidden in the very oxymoron of a landscape garden if by landscape one means some view or prospect in which human art has no share. In a letter to the Rev. Mr Wheeler (1751) Joseph Spence lists the general rules which he followed in designing his garden. He begins this list with a peculiar definition of the genius of the place:

> The first [principle] and most material is to consult the Genius of the place. What is, is the great guide as to what ought to be.[11]

Symptomatically read, the last sentence is an expression of an extreme ontological scepticism suggesting that being is but a theoretical guide or a handbook to the construction of some more proper reality. In the context of a text about gardening, however, "what is" probably refers to the territory upon which the garden is to be constructed as should be. A simplified version of Spence's first principle would sound something like "first go and see the place." Yet the genius that dwells there somehow complicates a plain

---

[9] E. Darwin, *A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools* (Dublin 1798), p. 25.

[10] T. Eagleton, *The Ideology...*, p. 51.

[11] *The Genius of the Place. The English Landscape Garden 1620--1820*, J. D. Hunt and P. Willis, eds. (London: Paul Elek 1975), p. 268.

reading of the statement. It actually seems that the genius is not the place itself, but a certain inscription upon the place which can be consulted, like a guide book or a conduct book for women, for instance. Yet it is not a secret kind of writing that Spence wants to consult, but, rather the spirit of the place which constitutes its identity, its uniqueness and with which Spence is somehow capable of communicating. Since what is at stake is correction ("what ought to be"), it is the spirit of the place which prompts the gardener what it finds wrong with itself and guides the gardener to perfection. In order to be understood, the spirit needs another spirit of the kind within the addressee with whom he communicates on the basis of shared feelings, on the basis of a Humean sympathy. The gardener does not, of course, intervene in nature by changing the place, but follows its own dictates, he does what nature, both his own and that expressed by the genius of the place, wants him to do. He changes the place without changing nature.

Spence's first principle is reminiscent, of course, of Pope's call to first following Nature in *An Essay on Criticim* (1711). Spence's third principle seems to confirm this: "3ly To follow Nature."[12] However, if Pope can still talk about just standards of nature and natural rules, Spence follows the silent voice of nature's spirit and actually recreates it without reaching to human art, creates a garden in the image of nature:

> Gardening is an imitation of 'Beautiful Nature,' and therefore should not be like works of art. Wherever art appears, the gardener has failed his execution. Our old gardens were formed by the rule and square, with a perpetual uniformity and in a manner more fit for architecture than for pleasure-grounds. Nature never plants by line, or in angles.[13]

Thus the garden as a pleasure ground is a space where there is nothing artificial, a space away from both culture and wild nature, as opposed to the beautiful one, whose spirit dictates how to make its wildness agreeable. The "Beautiful Nature" is also irregularly harmonious, lacking any geometrical patterns like straight lines or squares which are, of course, constructs of pure reason, and as such inadmissible in the garden because the spirit of the place, rendered as some natural gardener in the above fragment, never plants geometrically but naturally. Nature is a master gardener whom those endowed with the polite imagination and enough money to buy a "place" are capable of consulting and following his suggestions concerning the improvement of the other nature, of a her who, like a woman from the conduct books, lacks taste and produces deficient or displeasing patterns:

---

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., pp. 268—269.

> 4ly To assist or correct the general character of the ground, if deficient or displeasing. [...] If the ground be all flat, one should make risings and inequalities in it: very small swellings will help much if properly placed, and natural irregular risings (mounts) where an particular object or pleasing prospect is to be caught, etc.[14]

Imperfection is thus, however conditionally, inscribed within the "general character of the ground" which must be assisted in a self-correction of sorts as to eventually become pleasingly irregular by way of, exactly, regulating nature back to irregularity. Nature as it were goes out of itself in the form of a spirit or feeling which works on the same wavelength as that of the owner of the place and in the common effort both the owner and the spirit naturally negotiate what is proper and where it should be properly placed. Irregularity and variety can be pleasing and beautiful provided that all the "citizens" of a garden do not quarrel with each other, that the space of the garden is ordered in such a way that the plants and objects of conflicting characters never meet with each other but harmoniously coexist in the natural order of the garden segregated and properly located by the gardener watchful of the natural order of things; "To observe the different friendships and enmities of different colours, and to place the most friendly ones next to each other" says Spence's 15th principle.[15]

Seen as an allegory of society, a garden is a space where property as character is naturalized. Variety of characters is acceptable provided these characters are properly (i.e. naturally) organized, assigned proper places or positions agreeable to gardener's eye aided by the natural predispositions of the place expressed by its spirit. This naturalization of property as an individual character also entails naturalization of property as ownership. The genius of the place is but a lonely spirit who "fails his execution" as to what the place should be like without the actual gardener, the owner of the place.

Ownership is inscribed within the very idea of "beautiful nature" as the demand for being corrected, of being made beautiful or agreeable. Left to itself, without the proprietor, the place is wild and actually unnatural, an "ugly" nature of sorts which really needs a master who will execute its beauty. It is this property of being a property that guarantees naturalness and beauty of all the surrounding places which, though belonging to others, will express their beauty on the basis of the shared sentiment for property which is as universal as beauty. The agreeable space of one's garden should thus be surrounded with equally agreeable spaces in the manner friendly colours are placed next to each other. Nature, the beautiful one, is an universal thing,

---

[14] Ibid., p. 269.
[15] Ibid., p. 270.

and fencing one's property in a too visible way would suggest that outside the fence there might be something less natural, a nobody's space which needs correction. Just as individuals are not fenced from each other within the society thus making possible the exchange of agreeable sentiments, so too the boundaries of gardens must be invisible. The principle of unity in variety holds together both the society and the garden thus making them both contiguous and continuous wholes. Contiguity grants independence and property, but the various, independent individuals must be so much alike, naturally beautiful, that the whole is but a continuity of similar specimens mimetically linked by the demand of being natural. Hence the following three principles of Spence's:

> 8ly To conceal the bounds of your grounds everywhere, if possible. [...]
> 9ly To unite different parts of your garden gently together.
> 10 To contrive the outparts so, as to unite well with the country round about them.[16]

The unification of differences will ideally be realised as the denial of the outside as really different from the inside. A well united territory is agreeable in all its parts and so is an ideal society of beautiful people living in a beautiful landscape.

Though traditionally classified as an aesthetic study, a study in aesthetics, Burke's *Enquiry* quite openly declares that it is also a "sociological" study, a study of the category of the beautiful which Burke defines as a social quality:

> I call beauty a social quality; for when women and men, and not only they, but when other animals give us a sense of joy and pleasure in beholding them (and there are many that do so), they inspire us with sentiments of tenderness and affection towards their persons; we like to have them near us, and we enter willingly into a kind of relation with them, unless we should have strong reasons to the contrary.[17]

Society is thus a pleasurable cohabitation in which everybody has a distinct habitat, but where there are agreeable neighbours whose very appearance is a pleasurable kind of sight. This pleasure arises from their seeing us as equally beautiful, and it is this mutual giving of pleasure arising from similarity, and actually from mimicry, that is the core of Burke's idea of the beautiful. The agreeable space of a garden surrounding one's home, one's villa, is a metaphor of the society, of the social sentiments made easily available

---

[16] Ibid.

[17] E. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London 1912), pp. 66–67.

even when one is by himself, a space to which one can easily "travel" without actually leaving one's home and thus, in contact with the beautiful sight, cool down his heated imagination, for instance, in the way Hume returned to the social pleasures from the world of sceptical philosophy.

The principle which dictates Spence that he should hide the fence of the garden is the principle of being open to society, to the society one finds agreeable, and which is equally open to the gardener. One cannot separate oneself from society and live in solitude because "an entire life of solitude," as Burke puts it, "contradicts the purposes of our being, since death itself is scarcely an idea of more terror."[18] It is important to notice here that it is not society in general that is productive of the pleasurable feeling of elegant coexistence, but the society as experienced by an individual, the cultivated part of the society whose neighbourhood one accepts as friendly. "Good company, lively conversations, and the endearments of friendship, fill the mind with great pleasure,"[19] Burke declares. Absolute solitude deprives a person of such pleasures and actually banishes him to the terrifying sphere comparable to death.

Unlike the absolute solitude, however, Burke adds that "a temporary solitude, on the other hand, is itself agreeable. This may perhaps prove that we are creatures designed for contemplation as well as action."[20] Since the space of the well designed garden as an extension of the social agreeability dictated by the genius of the place does not allow for any kind of solitude, since everything in the garden is but an expression of beauty ("a social quality") Burke's temporary solitude is a mental operation, "contemplation" as opposed to the "action" of lively conversations, to the "action" of the pleasurable cohabitation with others. The temporary solitude is thus, as in Hume, a mental departure from the social world, a departure within which there is inscribed the necessity of return. Since this "departure" is simultaneously, as we have seen, a mental disorder resulting from the sedentary life, the cure of a travel back to the agreeable can be easily applied as, without visible fences, wherever one goes one is welcome by the agreeable social landscape which calms the mind and puts it into proper action. One cannot, say, topographically depart from the social sphere because one either sees an already cultivated space of a garden or meets the genius of an as yet uncultivated place which makes the potential encounter of some wilder kind of nature always already marked by a silent presence of what the place should be.

---

[18] Ibid., p. 69.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.

On some broader grounds, like America, for instance, the genius of the place takes the name of conversion and bringing light, of a marriage of, as Gayatri Spivak puts it, "Europe and its not yet-human other, of soul making."[21] This soul making is of course inscribed as a potentiality of having an European soul within the disagreeable Indians who, without that soul, are but wild plant-like figures which the genius of the place would rather not see within its domain. Since the genius of the place cannot act alone but needs a proprietor of the place to be consulted, it is the latter one that will decide as to the method of beautification. As not-yet-human, Indians have to wait for their humanity either taking the role of "natural slaves"[22] (provided that there is a discernible trace of human nature within them) or have to be expelled from the territory and in case of resistance exterminated. Colonial and aesthetic discourses go hand in hand and the idea of "beautification" of space is by no means politically innocent. The possibility of a rhetorical reduction of people to plants or weeds is the governing principle of colonial discourse which actually depopulates the colonial territories exactly in the manner huge territories of the English homeland have been depopulated in order that beautiful gardens could be created. Joseph Damer, for instance, the future Earl of Dorchester depopulated the whole village of Milton only because he didn't want it "in sight of his mansion."

> He removed the whole place — a hundred houses, a brewery, a grammar-school, [...] almhouses, inns, even the very tombstones. Even so, it is recorded that Mr. Damer was much annoyed because the bones of past Miltonians kept turning up as he laid out his gardens.[23]

This theme of depopulation is, of course, the theme of Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* (1770), a poem which compares a landscape garden to the grave of rural community ("The country blooms — a garden and a grave" [line 302]). A landscape garden is, for Goldsmith, a fallen land, a land "'betrayed' by the seducer, luxury; for the land, unproductive luxury is equivalent to death. The earth is dislocated into human history, it dies into time," as Laurence Goldstein puts it.[24] Away form his rural, Irish home Goldsmith makes the nostalgia for the lost past a theme equally well applicable to the depopulation of English villages as to the draconian laws of the British

---

[21] G. C. Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," in *The Feminist Reader. Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*, C. Belsey and J. Moore, eds. (MacMillan 1989), p. 180.

[22] Cf. H. White, *Tropics of Discourse. Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1987), pp. 185—188.

[23] L. Goldstein, *Ruins and Empire. The Evolution of Theme in Augustan and Romantic Literature* (Pittsburgh 1977), p. 104.

[24] Ibid., p. 111.

colonists which literally depopulated Ireland by economically forced emigration. Ireland dies into history, into time, in the way rural nature, regulated only by the natural rhythm of the seasons, becomes subjected to whimsical theories of beauty as practiced by the British gentry. If history institutionalizes forgetfulness (as José Rabasa claims in his allegorical reading of Mercator's *Atlas*)[25] in the way topographers replace the native geographical names of "discovered" territories, the names which they treat as nonexistent, then enclosures do exactly the same with the rural land simultaneously making it useless. Using Spence's terms, what is, is translated into what should be, ignoring the past and actually seeing it as the displeasing bones of the dead which occasionally turn up upon the smooth surface of Joseph Damer's lawn, for instance. Garden is thus for Goldsmith an allegory of forgotten past, of nature infected by the luxurious pleasures of landowners who, by leveling old tombstones, create spaces where no death is in sight as a part of the less beautiful nature which the genius of the place, the spokesman for the beautiful nature, is silent about.

Goldsmith sees the British lanscape garden, the idea of landscape garden, as contrary to nature, as through and through artificial, as an exact opposite of Spence's demand that there should be no trace of human art in one's garden. A luxurious kind of nature is not natural at all, it is nature already "displaced by the vanity of London" in which Goldsmith lives "as a hostage in the oppressor's camp."[26] Simultaneously, however, Goldsmith's rhetoric accepts the oppression of the artificial, imposed pleasure as actually necessary and inevitable. In *The Citizen of the World* (1762) he writes:

> The more various our artificial necessities, the wider is our circle of pleasure; for all pleasure consists in obviating necessities as they rise; luxury therefore, as it encreases our wants, encreases our capacity for happiness.[27]

The logic of this sentence is really deceptive, though, as it seems, it is not going to deceive Goldsmith's wealthier readers, as Laurence Goldstein claims,[28] with his acceptance of imposed luxury. Rather, it is Goldsmith who is trying to convince himself that he has not accepted it. Goldsmith is quite explicit here as to the artificiality of all pleasures simultaneously saying that they are necessary. The image of a land from before the "conquest" by the landscape garden, the image of some true, natural order of things betrayed by luxury ("Thus fares the land, by luxury betrayed;/ In nature's simplest

---

[25] Cf. J. Rabasa, "Allegories of the Atlas," in *Europe and its Others*, F. Barker, P. Hulme, M. Inersen, D. Loxley, eds. (Colchester: University of Essex 1985).

[26] Ibid., p. 103

[27] Quoted in ibid., p. 102.

[28] Cf. ibid.

charms at first arrayed; [lines 280—281]) is an imaginary vision comparable to the visions of the natural philosophers criticized by Hume as fictitious. By rendering this past, natural world as the object of his homesick nostalgia Goldsmith propagates a world without the necessary pleasures, a natural world in which, as yet, the sphere of aesthetics does not exist. The world is necessarily aesthetic, naturally artificial (here he accepts the oppressors' position) and the life "in nature's simplest charms" can only be an imaginary world to which one can nostalgically travel (like Hume to the world of philosophy), but from which one is always bound to return to the necessarily artificial world of pleasures. If one simultaneously understands artificial as foreign (to nature), then one is actually bound to be a foreigner, even in one's own country, and it is for this reason, I think, that Goldsmith writes about the Irish as if he was English, and about the English as if he was Irish. The English construct gardens thus destroying nature while the Irish, and he uses here the pronoun "They,"

> live in a fruitful country [...] sequestrated from the rest of mankind, protected by a powerful nation from foreign insult. [...] They have no important national concerns to make them anxious, or cloud their tempers with the solemnity of pride. In such circumstances they are contented with indolence and pleasure, take every happiness as it presents, are easily excited to resent, and as easily induced to submission.[29]

What is at stake is more complex than simply being forced to write in a "tone of a smug landlord" in order to somehow function in Grub Street, as Goldstein claims.[30] It is the British who have provided the Irish both with security and with the artificial pleasures to which they submit and, though no longer Irish ("they have no important national concerns"), neither are they British as they content themselves with only a small fraction of the luxury, of the artificial necessity, of beauty whose abundance is necessary for the British to exist. The Irish submit their own pleasures and accept foreign ones because pleasures are anyway artificial (including the pleasure of being a nation) and, like Goldsmith, they emigrate to England simultaneously preserving their natural being in the past, in the Golden Age which they feel has been artificially suppressed, but which still lurks as a nostalgic absence, as a remembrance of innocence in the way one always dreams of revisiting one's childhood. Since the revisiting is impossible, the horticultural conquest by the British, for instance, or any other culture (he talks about "a powerful nation") is as inevitable as growing old. One's resistance to this oppression can thus only be a living in the past, living now and then, outside history which demands

[29] Quoted from *The Royal Magazine* (1760), in ibid., p. 100.
[30] Cf. ibid.

facts to be present, and which cannot be made present if they also take place here and there at the same time, in England and in Ireland, for instance.

Goldsmith's position is exactly that of the citizen of the world for whom, as Goldstein rightly notices, the haunting by ephemeral shades, though desirable as a token of the lost paradise, is also a condition of "imprisonment in the enemy camp."[31] Goldsmith feels enslaved by artifice, yet he simultaneously accepts it as the constitutive oustide of the "ephemeral shades," of the haunting presence of ghosts and spirits which, paradoxically, can only be revived by the artifice, in the artistic creation of deserted villages which mark gardens with tokens of decay. Culture is the grave of nature, but it is equally natural as death. Nature dies through culture, it is a grave of nature within which there lives the forgotten nature.

The death of culture would thus be equally paradoxical as the death of the grave, as the death of death, an image equally improbable and tautological as the revival of life. Goldsmith's position of the citizen of the world is the position from which one can escape the predicament of choice of being either this or that, and from which one can be critical of the subjection to an empire only by accepting one's political status of a citizen simultaneously not defining one's topographical and, importantly, temporal positions. Goldsmith is not the kind of the citizen of the world who is at home everywhere, but one who is always homeless and homesick, longing for a home which is irrevocably, as he realizes, lost. The lost past is always elsewhere, and an attempt to revive it otherwise than mentally, through imagination, an attempt at its institutionalization is unthinkable as it would cure the nostalgia and thus deprive the world of the only trace of the existence of another nature, which would imply a total submission to the order dictated by the state, by empire. In this sense Goldsmith's deserted village also stands for the world, for the space depopulated by culture and inhabited by an imperial power of luxury with which everyone has to at least partially identify oneself simultaneously longing for something else. This something else, on the other hand, must be tolerated by the empire as an alien sphere which it finds disagreeable, but which it cannot fully conquer without turning against itself, without becoming a dream or a remembrance of the past itself, without deserting or depopulating itself.

It is here that Goldsmith seems to actually admire the empire, though he quite evidently does not love it. If the revival of the natural life is but a mental operation, then it must be held within the limits of one's mental capacities, and since this revival is a pleasant visitation, there must be a degree of artifice within the happy society he revisits. Though implied in Goldsmith's vision, such a society is in fact always already dead. What terrifies Goldsmith

[31] Ibid., p. 109.

is not the empire itself, but its infinite desire to extend its power of luxury over the whole world, which would be, of course, threatening to his position of the detached citizen of the world. A small empire, an empire of very simple (though artificial) pleasures is still acceptable and actually good provided that it is confined to a locality, to where it is and which changes this locality according to the demands of the true genius of the place which needs only a little luxury and simple pleasures. When Goldsmith approaches a garden, however, he already sees an excess of artifice in it and without denying the idea of the genius of the place, he claims its usurpation over the garden and recollects a better one who once dwelled there. Visiting William Shenstone's estate, Leasowes, he meets a genius of the place, but finds it absolutely disagreeable compared to the one who dwelled there of old:

> [...] the Genius of the place appeared before me, but more resembling the God of Time, than his more peculiarly appointed to the care of gardens. Instead of sheers, he bore a scythe. [...] Having remembered this place in its pristine beauty, I could not help condoling with him on the many alterations which had been made, and all for the worse: of the many shades which had been taken away, of the bowers that were destroyed by neglect, and the hedge-rows that were spoiled by clipping.[32]

The old genius of the place propagated pristine beauty, the original beauty of 'unclipped' hedges and bowers which has been killed by the God of Time. Goldsmith does not mind using sheers to modestly regulate nature according to modest pleasures dictated by a more modest genius of the place. Spence's first principle as to how design one's garden seems to be equally acceptable to both gardens, old and new. Unlike Spence, however, Goldsmith avoids using the phrase "natural beauty" and calling it "pristine" renders it as originary, only slightly marked by the inevitable artifice I have mentioned above. What transforms the true Genius of the place into a deathlike figure of the God of Time is only the measure of the artifice which, in the hands of the great landowners, lacks any measure. Hence the feeling of oppression and terror. Hence one more paradox: oppression is either good or bad depending on its measures and tools, and it is ideal when it does not introduce any alterations within the pristine arrangement of things. Once having used sheers, it should now only keep an eye on the order thus created. Since, however, the oppressors have already used a scythe and thus increased the domain of artifice, this artifice became as it were naturalized, it increased our "capacity for happiness" and though one cannot really change it now back to the original, one can at least mourn, condole or weep over the lost past which one revisits visiting its devastated ruins in the form of English gardens.

---

[32] Quoted from Goldsmith's essay "The History of a Poet's Garden," in ibid., p. 108.

The "pristine beauty" of Ireland is thus also posited there and then. The Irish are "they" because it is vain to identify oneself with the past, with ghosts and spirits of the places which no longer exist. Goldsmith simply wants to conserve the world as it is so as not to allow any further changes, to stabilize the growth of empire so as it does not, eventually, devastate and depopulate itself. He would probably agree with Eagleton's vision of the Gaelic revival as a chaotic attempt to recreate what already does not exist reminiscent of the Babelian confusion of tongues:

> The city [Dublin during the Gaelic revival] was a cacophony of tongues [...] Some of the literati would write only in Gaelic, frightened of becoming European lest they be thought English. Others maintained that the Gaelic revival would simply make their fellow countrymen illiterate in two languages rather than in one. Some translated their own short stories from one language to the other, occasionally forgetting in which tongue they had composed the original. John Synge pulled off the rare trick of writing in English and Gaelic simultaneously, using an Irish peasant speech as no other writer had used it, and probably no peasant either.[33]

Goldsmith would rather avoid this. He chose a living in the past, in London, simultaneously locating the past there. He thus also lived in a borrowed home (a metaphor of metaphor for du Marsais) which he proclaimed to be "the republic of letters" in which he could not fully identify himself with either the Irish or the English. England was a metaphor of decay and death, Ireland was a metaphor of a lost life. He accepted the death of Ireland but he also accepted the empire, the principle which inflicted death simultaneously fearing that this empire might also pass away, like Rome, thus depriving him of the possibility of metaphorizing the lost past. England does symbolize decay, but without that decay, as a metaphor, there would be no room for the equally metaphorical, living past.

Writing about English colonial expansion Goldsmith, quite symptomatically, at least partially identifies himself with the British without reading the colonization of Ireland as colonization:

> [...] an empire, by too great a foreign power may lessen its natural strength, and that dominion often becomes more feeble as it grows more extensive. The ancient Roman empire is a strong instance of the truth of the assertion. [...] To be as explicit as possible, I see no reason why we should aggrandize our colonies at our own expense; an acquisition of new colonies is useless, unless they are peopled; but to people those deserts that lie behind our present colonies, would require multitudes from the mother-country; and I do not find we are too populous at home.[34]

---

[33] T. Eagleton, *Saints and Scholars* (London: Verso Publishers 1987), p. 50.

[34] Quoted from *Weekly Magazine*, in L. Goldstein, *Ruins and...*, p. 105.

"We" is an obvious mark of identification with the empire here. Goldsmith again says "enough," and he says it not because colonization kills people and depopulates other territories, but, paradoxically, because it depopulates the empire. Yet he identifies himself only with the empire which is capable of controlling its desire to expand because too great an expansion leads to a deconstruction of empire, it actually changes the empire into the desert which it conquers. Goldsmith obviously knew that the as yet unconquered territories were peopled by Indians and yet he quite explicitly presents the territories as an uninhabited waste land where there has never dwelled any, however pristine, genius of the place, as a disagreeable, huge territory incommensurable with any artificial pleasures and measures. West of the East coast, America, unlike Ireland, is too foreign to be conquered, it is a space simply too vast to be agreeable to human nature and thus lacking any human dwellers.

Goldsmith is thus not writing about America here, but about the empire, about its power to produce luxury which must confine itself to territories already marked by some kind of artifice. Simultaneously, however, he realizes that this power can hardly be restrained as the difference between wildness and artifice is marked by the vague notion of nature which he also ascribes to the strength of the state. The empire must not reach outside itself, it must not engage in things foreign to it, because it will lose this natural cohesion which is constituted, as we have seen elsewhere, by sympathetic feelings of its inhabitants. Upon too great a space, upon a foreign space where no familiar genius tells us what should be, this cohesion may easily lead to dispersion, to, exactly, depopulation. Yet, as he witnesses, the empire does reach outside itself exactly in the manner this movement outside is inscribed within the individuals as the sphere where agreeable pleasures are communicated and exchanged. It is for this reason that Goldsmith criticizes the empire with which he partially identifies. The expanding empire is too vast for him too fully identify with. As I have already said, he admires it and does not love it.

V

The Sublime (On Burke's Submission and Kant's Starry Sky)

Do you think you can tell heaven from hell?

Pink Floyd

The distinction between admiration and love which ends the preceding chapter is one of the numerous attempts of Burke to eventually tell the sublime from the beautiful which he undertakes in his *Enquiry*. Being no philosopher, Goldsmith only vaguely and metaphorically hints at the sublime which he sees in an unrestrained growth, in growth to infinity of the pleasures, of artificial luxuries whose limited growth he finds agreeable, and whose abundance is productive either of deserted villages (which is still agreeable because productive of the pleasurable nostalgia) or to actual living in the deserts of America which goes hand in hand with the growth of emigration from England (and, more importantly, Ireland) and the "increase of production" of landscape gardens by those few who stay at home with even more territory to devastate. Burke claims his *Enquiry* to be philosophical and in addition to "statements that are often absurd"[1] as regards his minute analyses of shades of feelings and passions, the general scheme of his work is very much like that of Goldsmith; an identification with something one cannot identify oneself with. Let us begin with admiration and love:

[1] S. Monk, *The Sublime...*, p. 86.

> There is a wide difference between admiration and love. The sublime, which is the cause of the former, always dwells on great objects, and terrible; the latter on small ones, and pleasing; we submit to what we admire, but we love what submits to us; in one case we are forced, in the other we are flattered into compliance.[2]

Though quite a lot has been already written about Burke's sublime, no commentators, to my knowledge, have noticed a certain lapsus in this important fragment which, in a sense, agreeably summarizes what Burke didn't want to say — we are sublime to what submits to us. There are as it were two levels of the sublime in Burke, both consisting in submission. We love what submits to us, but it submits to us because it admires us in the way we submit to the sublime because we admire it. Thus depending on the perspective we are either sublime or beautiful.

In Burke's rhetoric the beautiful little something submits to us voluntarily, with no terror constitutive of the sublime. We love small things for their submission to us because no force is used against us, small things are too weak to impose their beauty upon us and all they have at their disposal is flattery which is but a version of seduction. The beautiful only wants to be possessed by us, it seduces us to this possesion and for this reason it is also the social quality of agreeability which I have already mentioned. Small things are nice to be with because they themselves form a society of subjected subjects, of individuals who with pleasure submit to submission. What goes unmentioned in Burke is that social submission and the something to which such beautiful things submit stand on two different levels. If society is a "we," then it submits itself not to what it loves, but to what it admires, and thus to the sublime which actually imposes the submission. Yet, on the other hand, the sublime is posited as hostile to an ideal social order as openly repressive, as something to which we are forced and in which we do not participate voluntarily, a space openly hostile and thus improper for an agreeable cohabitation. In order to be beautiful, things have to be blind to the force to which they submit and actually see it as equally beautiful and thus no object or rule to which the word "submission" is applicable. Since it is the sympathy of feeling which links society, a possibility of sympathy with what subjects us to being beautiful has to be a part of this ideology since one cannot really identify oneself and agreeably live with the sublime as the latter, in its pure form, is productive of nothing but threat and terror:

> Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. [...] When danger

[2] E. Burke, *A Philosophical...*, p. 212.

> and fear press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience.[3]

Sympathy and close coexistence with the sublime is thus unthinkable as it is, at an extreme point, more than painful — a coexistence with "an emissary of this king of terrors" which is death. The sublime has to be kept at a distance, modified, changed, transformed into some more agreeable shapes so that its approaches do not translate our life into a sickness unto death, a fearful life full of unwelcome admiration but empty of the 'cohesive' power of life. The sublime is translatable into something which brings "delight," a pleasure which, unlike beauty, is not pleasurable in itself, but a pleasure which is produced by the removal of pain,[4] a relief which comes after the terrible part of the sublime has been done away with, pushed away beyond the horizon of the living community.

Like Goldsmith's America, Burke's sublime is not really an area to be populated (and in the context of the pleasures of subjecting this analogy is not unmotivated here), it is a vast, huge, obscure, dark, infinitely other *terra incognita* whose cognition is unthinkable unless it is somehow diminished and enlightened. We can fully conquer and socialize only those things which subject themselves, where the conquest has already, again as in Goldsmith, taken place. Yet the possibility of keeping the sublime at a distance (though still in sight), as well as the possibility of its modification actually make conquest a necessary movement against the stagnation of our curiosity which "has an appetite which is very sharp, but very easily satisfied."[5] Society avoids stagnation by feeding on the edible parts of the sublime which provides it with a variety of delightful foods which enliven it, which nourish, but whose excess is painful and actually lethal as it, as we have seen, is dangerously close to death. The sublime, like the Greek *pharmakon*, is both a remedy and a poison, "both good (*agatha*) and painful (*aniara*),"[6] which cannot be fully harmless "or fully wholesome; beneficence is not a simple good, pestilence could be a *pharmakon* or remedy, the beneficial virtue of a substance does not prevent it from causing pain, and pain and disease themselves could be the agents for health and the absence of pain."[7] Since the full satisfaction of curiosity is disagreeable for Burke, the 'unpleasure' thus felt can be cured

---

[3] Ibid., pp. 59—60.

[4] Cf. S. Monk, *The Sublime...*, p. 91.

[5] E. Burke, *A Philosophical...*, p. 42.

[6] Cf. J. Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. B. Johnson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1981), p. 99.

[7] H. de Almeida, *Romantic Medicine and John Keats* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1991), pp. 148—149.

by the delightful horror of the sublime provided that the pain, the terror of its application soon becomes delight alone:

> [...] if the pain and terror are so modified as not to be actually noxious; if the pain is not carried into violence, and the terror is not conversant about the present destruction of person; as these emotions clear the parts, whether fine or gross, of a dangerous and troublesome incumbrance, the are capable of producing delight; not pleasure, but a sort of delightful horror, a sort of tranquility tinged with terror; which, as it belongs to self-preservation, is one of the strongest passions. Its object is the sublime. Its highest degree I call *astonishment*; the subordinate degrees are awe, reverence, and respect, which, by the very etymology of the words, shew from what source they are derived, and how they stand distinguished from positive pleasure.[8]

Admiration is of course one more species subordinated to astonishment which is totally unwelcome as a passion which is caused by the immediacy of the sublime in its unmodified version, a paralysing fear which, like Addison's infinity, fills the mind full and stops it in its working:

> [...] astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended [...] In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. [...] No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear.[9]

The sublime in its pure, terrifying form is thus inconceivable, it momentarily makes one unable to perceive anything and in fact brings one to an almost immediate presence of death as a monolithic kind of nothingness which is so huge that there is not enough room in one's mind to take it. Hence the necessity of its modification, of actually diminishing it to some more agreeable size which the mind can be capable of conceiving, but which it is still unable to subject or make submit and thus make beautiful. The operation of the sublime has thus cathartic effect on the mind as it clears the mind of the "dangerous and troublesome incumbrance" through the danger whose deadly threat is translated into admiration, reverence or respect. If love is the domain of health and beauty, admiration is a painful submission to treatment, a negative pleasure, as Burke frequently refers to it, whose negativity is naturally painful and which thus produces delight, the lack or elimination of pain which, for Burke, is not as yet pleasure but a promise of pleasure of the organism thus made only healthy.

---

[8] E. Burke, *A Philosophical...*, pp. 257—258.

[9] Ibid., pp. 95—96.

The oxymoron "delightful horror" removes the "horror", part of it to the past leaving us with the delight of once having been subjected to submission. By modifying the sublime, by distancing ourselves from it and diminishing it, we diminish the degree of its rule or power to subject which in the case of astonishment is infinite. And though Burke claims that admiration is nothing but submission, this admiration is already a product of our own power to control passions, to subject the sublime and thus make it a larger kind of the beautiful.

The theme of the genius of the place imposes itself here irresistibly. It is as though within the sublime landscape, be it a sea, high mountains, a desert or an infinite landscape of the mind there is already inscribed what is terrifying and horrible and from which we should distance ourselves and then modify by our art creating an enclosure of beauty, a not too large garden, for instance where we enjoy subjection by means of shears rather than scythe. The position of the gardener in Burke's theory, however, must be different from that of the "submitted" object and the latter is actually denied any immediate contact with the sublime. If there is anything it can admire it is the greatness of the gardener who takes the place of the sublime and produces submissive objects which agreeably yield to his will or whim. Admiration or respect are emanations of the sublime, which, no longer sublime themselves, play exactly the same role as the sublime on some "lower" level. Burke's "We," in astonishment, submits to the force and terror of the sublime and thus hardened in the war with the alien enters society which loves this entry and voluntarily submits to it as it no longer brings threat but pure pleasure. This last image of warfare and sexuality brings to mind the question of feminization of the aesthetic discourse which I have mentioned earlier. Eagleton's penchant for this theme makes him summarize Burke's enterprise explicitly as a sexual violence of the upper-class which pretends it is not violent:

> The sublime is an imaginary compensation for all the uproarious old upper-class violence, tragedy repeated as comedy. It is beauty's point of inner fracture, a negation of settled order without which any order would grow inert and wither. The sublime is the anti-social condition of all sociality, the infinitely unrepresentable which spurs on to yet finer representations, the lawless masculine force which violates yet perpetually renews the feminine enclosure of beauty.[10]

What Eagleton does not notice, or at least does not say, is that the presence of the sublime is denied to the "feminine enclosure" to which it always already speaks from the position of the law of the masculine law formed and, as

[10] T. Eagleton, *The Ideology...*, p. 54.

I have already said, hardened, in contact with the sublime. Its violence is thus legalized and, in effect, no longer felt as harmful, horrible — no longer felt as, exactly, violence. On the orderly social level the sublime simply does not exist and it is reserved to speculative thinking of the philosophers who expose themselves to violence in the name of (and for the sake of) happiness and of a Humean humanity which should engage itself in an exchange of some less lofty feelings and ideas: smaller, handier, more convenient, like the pleasures of embroidering, for instance. It is those who can naturally judge and tell good from evil, remedy from poison, sublime from beautiful, those naturally endowed with the proper taste who can formulate the law of taste and then teach others to discover it without providing them with things judged as tasteless or disgusting, like the sublime. The perpetual renewal of beauty, as necessary to avoid stagnation of ideas, is a matter of teaching and guiding others to discover beauty in things already offered as beautiful.

It is not a coincidence that Burke's *Enquiry* begins with an "Introduction" *On Taste*, in which Burke does not quite define this category only saying that it must be stable and unchangeable thus grounding his theory on this stability. "And indeed," he says,

> it is very necessary, at the entrance into such an enquiry as our present, to make this point as clear as possible; for if taste has no fixed principles, if the imagination is not affected according to some invariable and certain laws, our labour is like to be employed to very little purpose; as it must be judged as useless, if not an absurd undertaking, to lay down rules for caprice, and to set up for a legislator of whims and fancies.[11]

Tastes, unlike caprices or whims, do not quite differ. If they did, then one might find the sublime beautiful, or a little object disagreeable. Interestingly, Burke seems not to love the "little purpose" of a useless and absurd work implying, probably, that the purpose should be great, if not sublime, and that it should be the formulation of fixed principles of taste which, as yet, have not been formulated (at least Burke does not know them) and which must be formulated in order that Burke's certainty as to their existence is confirmed. Whims and fancies do not need a legislator as they are but feminine trifles which can be regulated if the proper principles of taste are legislated. Though the only argument for the existence of such principles is the absurdity of Burke's (or "our," as he probably speaks in the name of philosophers) *Enquiry*, it is upon this principle that he constructs his theory, actually failing to tell us what the sublime is and telling us that it, in a sense, does not exist (it is, in fact, Eagleton who tells us with some precision what it is). Since the sublime is accessible only through mediation and distance its immediate

---

[11] E. Burke, *A Philosophical...*, p. 3.

presence making us unable to conceive of it, we cannot verbalize it as some sort of positive category. Eventually, at the very beginning of the *Enquiry*, we learn that the great purpose of the book is scepticism and modesty, a total mistrust of our understanding:

> If an enquiry thus carefully conducted, should fail at last of discovering the truth, it may answer an end perhaps as useful, in discovering the weakness of our own understanding. If it does not make us knowing, it may make us modest.[12]

Hidden in the structure of the conditional sentence there is a promise, however faint, that in the midst of uncertainty, Burke has perhaps formulated some kind of truth. Still modestly, a few pages later, he warns the reader that s/he should not expect a "full dissertation on the Sublime and Beautiful" because Burke's task was much more modest than the completeness of explanation, that he "went no farther than the origin of these ideas."[13] Thus having said that going to beginnings of things is but a very modest enterprise, he goes on to say that, in fact, he wrote about the qualities of things rather than origins, and that it is really irrelevant whether he wrote about a sublime or a beautiful:

> If the qualities which I have ranged under the head of the Sublime be all found consistent with each other, and all different from those which I place under the head of Beauty [...] I am in little pain whether any body chooses to follow the name I give them or not, provided he allows that what I dispose under different heads are in reality different things in nature. The use I make of the words may be blamed, as too confined or extended; my meaning cannot well be misunderstood.[14]

It now turns out that Burke writes about difference which he believes is there, but which he cannot really verbalize. He is modest as regards his use of words, but he is quite certain that regardless of the words, the meaning is the last, unmovable instance which one must not question. There is a sublime, and there is a beautiful, but both are accessible only by analogy, through their qualities which are never things in themselves, but, like words, exist analogically, away from what they name.

Burke reaches to the origin of the ideas of the sublime and the beautiful through qualities, indirectly, without presenting the object as such simultaneously underlining his inability to present which, in Lyotard's reading of Kant, is the paradox of the sublime which "involves the finality of a non-finality and the pleasure of an unpleasure."[15] Burke's meaning is offered

---

[12] Ibid., pp. vi-vii.

[13] Ibid., p. ix.

[14] Ibid., pp. ix-x.

[15] J.-F. Lyotard, "The Sign of History," in *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History*, D. Attridge, G. Bennington and R. Young, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1987), p. 171.

the reader as a pleasure to be achieved away from writing, as a finality (origin, perhaps) which writing cannot finalize. Needless to say, the way Burke's meaning is to be understood, or seen, is through the operation which is constitutive of his theory of the sublime: withdrawal and modification. Writing as such is uncertain and words can obscure the meaning which is, as it were, an enclosure of beauty which in its purity cannot be taken for something else and which submits to us provided that we reduce the obscurity of writing by eventually rejecting it for the sake of truth, if "to make any thing very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary," then writing makes things terrifying, potentially productive of things which do not exist in the light of meaning (and reality), such as "the notions of ghosts and goblins, of which none can form clear ideas."[16] Thus in order to see what the sublime and the beautiful really are, to see Burke's meaning, one has to withdraw from the obscure sublime of writing, actually deny the sublime, in order to safely dwell where everything is small, nice, and clear. The sublime can be made present only in its absence exactly in the way meaning can be really present only in the absence of writing, when writing is seen as only a dark or obscure horizon behind which we approach the areas of uncertainty and the vastness of infinity. "Hardly any thing," says Burke,

> can strike the mind with its greatness, which does not make some sort of approach towards infinity; which nothing can do whilst we are able to perceive its bounds; but to see an object distinctly, and to perceive its bounds, is one and the same thing. A clear idea is therefore another name for a little idea.[17]

Little ideas, like small objects, are of course beautiful things, and Burke's lesson of modesty which his *Enquiry* is to teach us is also the lesson of the beautiful, a lesson of aesthetics. Burke does not want to strike anybody's mind with any greatness and all he wants to do is present some clear, and thus little, ideas of the sublime and of the beautiful which both, as clear and small, are now wholly *submitted* to human understanding. It is the bounds, the frame (Kant's parergon) which negatively constitute the work accomplished, the idea, which, however dark, obscure and close to infinity, is not contaminated or darkened by those approaches of infinity which constitute the limit constitutive of their presence. Writing is thus a substitute of some nonverbal communication of ideas which must be seen only as a limit, as the dangerous approach of the sublime, of darkness and uncertainty where "clear" and "little" mean different things but which, in the reality of presence, are in fact the same. Burke does declare that words are "The proper manner of conveying

---

[16] E. Burke, *A Philosophical...*, p. 99.

[17] Ibid., pp. 107–108.

the *affections* of the mind from one to another," because "there is a great insufficiency in all other methods of communication" (like music), simultaneously declaring that he uses words exactly for the reason that they are not quite clear. The access to clear things must lead through the perception of its bounds, through the threat of obscurity, because without this limit one could not really talk about the pleasures of making things submit, of making them small, or little, or clear. It is not being beautiful which is the sphere of interest of Burke, but making and becoming beautiful.

The pleasure of writing is thus the pleasure of laying things bare without quite depriving them of the "dress" which obscures them, but which seductively promises their nakedness and prompts man to action, to writing, for instance, whose very movement promises and actually makes the object of desire to which, or whom, it does not want to grant any idependence outside writing whose bounds the object has to continually perceive. A naked object is a desublimated object whose naked beauty, whose clearness, whose immediate accessibility makes it unattractive. "In reality," Burke declares, "a great clearness helps but little towards affecting the passions, as it is in some sort an enemy to all enthusiasms whatsoever."[18] Symptomatically read, this last statement says that clearness and beauty breed impotence, that once made naked, truth, idea, or whatever that has been made naked is incapable of exciting any pleasures. Burke's *Enquiry* which, as a philosophical text, promises to lay bare both the sublime and the beautiful, or at least, more modestly, their origins "in reality" says that things are neither purely sublime nor purely beautiful, both sublimity and beauty being little and clear ideas whose existence, like the existence of some stable foundations of taste, one cannot doubt though one has to satisfy oneself (and quite perversely so, as the eventual satisfaction is the end of affection) with the analogy, with qualities which are a mixture of both, which are neither this nor that, but which point to their origins in a presence, or in presences, which Burke cannot, and does not want to, uncover. Modesty which we are supposed to learn from the failure of (his) presentation is ambiguous as it propagates a Barthesian *jouissance*, a pleasure without separation,[19] a textual pleasure without an eventual satisfaction (which is the end of pleasure) simultaneously renderning this pleasure as dissatisfying exactly because the object to be "consumed" by the reader is separated from the text, lies outside it as a pure meaning or a cause which is only accessible through its effects, through phenomena or qualities which distort and hide their purity. Burke admits that what he is really

[18] Ibid., p. 102.

[19] Cf. R. Barthes, "From Work to Text," trans. S. Heath, in *Image-Music-Text*, S. Heath, ed. (Fontana/Collins 1977), p. 164.

presenting is neither sublime nor beautiful and then clearly declares that what is at stake is a phenomenology which searches for noumena, for blackness of black and whiteness of white, and not for some actualizations which are imperfect:

> If the qualities of the sublime and beautiful are sometimes found united, does this prove that they are the same; does it prove even that they are not opposite and contradictory? Black and white may soften and blend; but they are not therefore the same. Nor, when they are so softened and blended with each other, or with different colours, is the power of black as black, or of white as white, so strong as when each stands uniform and distinguished.[20]

The sublime and beautiful, like black and white, are thus rendered as principles which establish the practice of their actualization but which themeselves cannot be expressed or defined, they always exist in the middle, partaking of both extremes thus testifying to their existence. Any immediate contact with those principles is both impossible and actually deadly, as paralyzing as the unmediated sublime. The power of black or white is an instituting power of presence and order which in itself cannot be formulated, it is the power of the law whose formal formulation is actually reformulation, a distorting work of writing which, if believed to be only an expression without distortion, leads to the distortion of natural order comparable to the distortions caused by the French Revolution so abhorred by Burke. Burke loves the unformalizable exactly because there is a power in it (like in black or white), an informal power of sorts which belittles the world, confines it to an actualization of the unwritten law which we desire, but which is available to us only in a pleasurable garment and thus an aesthetic object which we can enjoy in the manner Burke wants to enjoy the English constitution in which he sees "the most glorious work of art," as Eagleton phrases it.[21] It is exactly the law made naked, and thus unpleasurable, which is the main aspect of Burke's dislike for the revolution in France. After the revolution

> all is to be changed. All the pleasing illusions, which made power gentle and obedience liberal, which harmonized assimilation, incorporated into politics the sentiments which beautify and soften private society, are to be dissolved by this new conquering empire of light and reason. All the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off.[22]

Here is yet another aspect of Burke's modesty. Nakedness in any form is indecent and is only made decent when somehow covered. Society must

---

[20] E. Burke, *A Philosophical...*, p. 239.

[21] T. Eagleton, *The Ideology...*, p. 43.

[22] E. Burke, *Reflections on the French Revolution* (London 1955), p. 75.

be decently lovable, submissive only to a certain extent, according to taste, of course, whose principles are also dressed or hidden within our hearts or minds. The post-revolution society is a desublimated society because, paradoxically, it stands face to face with the naked power of the sublime now rendered not exactly as darkness, but as a blinding light in which there is no shade to hide. This light must also be very cold because, further exploring the metaphor of dress and nakedness, Burke also says that we shiver in it:

> All the superadded ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns, and the understanding ratifies, as necessary to cover the defect of our naked, shivering nature, and to raise it to dignity in our own estimation, are to be exploded as a ridiculous, absurd, and antiquated fashion.[23]

Revolution brings fashion for nakedness and a country where everybody is naked is quite evidently not lovable, or lovely ("To make us love our country, our country ought to be lovely")[24] for Burke. Dress is an artificial thing, but as it dwells in the wardrobes of our hearts it is as natural as our feelings. Deep in our heart, we are what we wear — this could be Burke's redefinition of taste — thus making the defective "vulgar nature" into *la belle nature* which dignifies. Since it is irrelevant for Burke, as we have seen, what "heads" he gives to his meanings we might say that the word "revolution" is a synonym of the sublime, of the unrestrained power to make us submit against which we shiver, against which we are incapable of thinking or imagining and thus of "ratifying" what we should cover our nakedness with. Under the rule of the sublime in its pure, naked from, we become naked and defenseless against pure hegemony, pure power which makes us submit.

Away from that sublime, across the Channel, where decently dressed people decently live in a lovely, green country the sublime is unwelcome. The English make their country lovely, they design gardens thus covering all the defects of naked nature according to the taste which they negotiate with the British genius of the place. What is, let us repeat, is what it should be, and what should be is a nice dress, an artifice or a certain degree of luxury which Goldsmith saw as an artificial necessity and which Burke sees as equally necessary "superadded ideas" which naturally dwell in human hearts.

Spences's principles of garden design nicely annihilate the sublime without even mentioning it because in the landscape of continuous gardens without fences there is simply no room for anything alien and hostile, and even in the yet uncultivated areas there is a depository of the proper garment in the hands

---

[23] Ibid., p. 74.
[24] Ibid., p. 75.

of the genius of the place. France never had such a genius, and the designs of French gardens are but reflections of the *ancien regime* which never dwelt in human hearts and thus never had any contact with any nature. The artifice of the French garden is a pure, external artifice dictated by the will of the ruler who plants what he wants and where he wants and the regular geometry of such gardens is but an emanation of pure artifice as opposed to naturalized artifice of the British. The French Revolution, as seen by Burke, at least, is but a reversed version of the old regime, an elevation of pure reason whose proper place is in one's heart.

Kant's critique of pure reason, let us remark here, was also a critique of the French Revolution in which he saw an outburst of enthusiasm (which is for him the extreme limit of the sublime), of chaos and disorder uncontrolled by the moral law whose place is within. As a product of pure reason without rather than within, revolution is a dementia of sorts which is "occasioned by an object which is almost pure disorder, which has no figure [...] which is an abstraction refractory to all functions of presentation — even by *analoga*."[25] If presenting is, for Burke, a way of dressing, of writing necessarily only analogical to what it presents, then Kant's vision of the French Revolution presents it as "undressable," as a non-object so contrary to human nature that its disagreability is morally elevating as it allows humanity to judge it exactly as sublime, and thus testifies to "the progress of the faculty of judgement in mankind."[26]

The Kantian sublime, regardless of whether inspired by Burke, Addison, or Kant himself, is openly a promise of the eventual triumph of reason as the faculty of judgement over sensibility. Burke's sublime as such is a dreadful thing which can be made pleasantly terrifying by distance and modification by diminishing it as it were to what is more agreeable to our senses, by dressing it with a garment from the wardrobes of our hearts, to return to a metaphor of dressing so dear to Burke. Reason but "ratifies" the selection of the clothing which in itself is dictated by taste rather than reason. Reason alone, reason without heart, is as sublime as the French Revolution and its victory over sensibility would be necessarily a victory of oppression dictating to us how to dress and write; what is pleasurable and what is not. Kant does actually the same, only having subjected reason to a human subject, having made it subjective, he can make use of this category as always already, at least partially, dwelling within man, within the human heart, and thus constituting a sensible reason of sorts which will eventually take the rule in its hand rather then confine itself to the more modest role of the "ratifier." Reasonably speaking, Kant says that there is no sublime simultaneously giving us its definition:

---

[25] J.-F. Lyotard, "The Sign...," p. 174.

[26] Ibid., p. 177.

> *The sublime is that in comparison with which all else is small.* Here we readily see that nothing can be given in nature, no matter how great we judge it to be, which, regarded in some other relation, may not be degraded to the level of the infinitely little, and nothing so small which in comparison with some still smaller standard may not for our imagination be enlarged to the greatness of the world.[27]

Mathematically, greatness as such is nonexistent and numbers can only be greater or smaller than other numbers, and for this reason we are always capable of diminishing or enlarging what seems to us great or small. The ultimate greatness could only be an infinity. Reason, however, demands presentation, it operates with units and totalities, and it "will not exempt even the infinite [...] but rather renders it inevitable for us to regard this infinite [...] as completely given (i.e. given in its totality)."[28] The sublime is thus thinkable only as long as imagination inadequately judges the measures of things and does not see in the infinite a rational, ultimate measure of all things. Instead of stopping in its work, as in Addison, imagination should be supplemented by the faculty to judge and thus diminish or totalize the something which fills it with terror. In the same way the French Revolution, despite its seeming chaos and terrifying disruption of order, is pleasurable as a promise of the rule of the faculty of judgement, exactly because it evokes the feeling of terror

> The feeling of the sublime is [...] at once a feeling of displeasure, arising from the inadequacy of imagination in the aesthetic estimation of magnitude to attain to its estimation by reason, and a simultaneously awakened pleasure, arising from the very judgement of the inadequacy of sense being in accord with ideas of reason, so far as the effort to attain to these is for us law.[29]

In Burke there was a moment of pure astonishment caused by the paralyzing inflow of vastness which was then followed by the instinctive movement backward, by our compulsion for diminishing. In Kant the displeasure and pleasure are simultaneous so that there is no time left for the experience of an unpleasurable pleasure. It is this simultaneous awakening of pleasure that makes the sublime actually nonexistent, or, better, almost nonexistent. The sublime is something which almost cannot be presented because it is *colossal*, a concept which attracts Derrida's attention in his discussion of Kant's parergon because described by Kant as

---

[27] I. Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. I. C. Meredith (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1973), p. 97.

[28] Ibid., p. 97.

[29] Ibid., p. 106.

> "almost too large for any presentation" (*der für alle Darstellung beinahe zu gross ist*). A concept can be too big, almost too big for presentation. [...] It did not slip from Kant's pen. [...] The almost too retains a certain categorical fixity. It is repeated regularly, and each time associated with big.[30]

What is inscribed within the "almost too" is the possibility of the finitude of infinity, of its totalization. Blake's dream of holding infinity in the palm of one's hand seems to find its realization in Kantian subjectivism in which the human subject itself becomes "almost infinite" as capable of absorbing things almost too big for its capacity. Approaches of infinity are both frustrating and pleasurable as they confirm that what seems to be beyond our capacity can be entirely capacitated, we become aware, as Paul Crowther says, "that we are beings with capacities that transcend the limitations of our finite phenomenal existence."[31] Such limitations, however, are necessarily paradoxical ones, as they are the limitations of the unlimited, the realization that there is a (supersensible) limit (law) which "capacitates" us to somehow cope with infinity. We can transcend the infinite exactly by putting the limit upon it, by supplementing the infinite with a parergon, a frame which thus translates the infinite into an ergon, the work accomplished.

Though both Burke and Kant see the sublime mostly in nature rather than in art, in roaring oceans, high mountains and vast deserts, they simultaneously frame the sublime in the gesture of its limitation, in diminishing it to the size commensurable with the capacities of human understanding and taste. Since the sublime is simultaneously defined, or "de-fined," as Derrida phrases it, "as indefinable for the understanding,"[32] we make it accessible to it as an already aesthetic object thus transgressing the limit of our non-understanding. Otherwise it would be impossible to talk, like Burke, about the opposition of the sublime and the beautiful as an opposition "can only arise between two determinate objects, having their contours, their edges, their finitude."[33] Paradoxically, neither is it possible to speak of an opposition after the sublime has been already framed as the latter gesture domesticates the sublime within the field of the aesthetic experience and renders it but a species of the beautiful.

The starry sky above Kant's head reminds him of the moral law within, infinity is transcended into the finitude of the subject. The starry sky is infinite, which does not terrify Kant at all, and which actually assures him of the

---

[30] J. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. G. Bennington and I. McLeod (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1987), p. 125.

[31] P. Crowther, *The Kantian Sublime. From Morality to Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1991), p. 100.

[32] J. Derrida, *The Truth...*, p. 126.

[33] Ibid., p. 127.

existence of the moral law within. The sublime necessitates Kant's judgement, tells him that there is a law of which Kant is so certain that he does not see that this certainty is already a judgement, a subjective one. Moral law exists within as the starry sky above, and Kant's outside is but a bodily vessel which contains the law, but which is simultaneously not his private law, but a universal one, shared by all and executed in their judgements. The law is thus the very essence of the subject, the supersensible constitution whose unwritten articles all of us follow being thus obedient only to ourselves. Like the genius of the place in an English garden, the moral law tells us from within what we should be, what is good and what is bad. We do what we like, we are free, because we naturally like good and dislike bad things. This punning confusion of ethics and aesthetics reflects Kant's use of beauty as a symbol of what is morally good, and which enables him to render aesthetic judgements equally universal as the moral ones:

> the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good, and only in this light (a point of view natural to every one, and which every one exacts from others as duty) does it give us pleasure with an attendant claim to the agreement of everyone.[34]

Since the moral law, as the supersensible, can hardly be made present to the senses, it is the aesthetic pleasure which symbolically reflects the unfelt pleasure of the good. Aesthetics is the reflection of ethics, but simultaneously the only means to somehow present the latter. Since an exacting of duty is also at stake, the question of aesthetics is inevitably the question of politics as it is in fact taste, the aesthetic judgement, which, as universal, legitimizes some use of power against those whose points of view are less natural.

The ethical subject is impenetrable, inaccessible to any kind of knowledge as an unrepresentable depth but it comes up, as it were, to the social sphere by displaying its taste which is an analogical presentation of its unpresentable morals. Kant's rhetoric, interestingly, sees this coming up as going down in which mind becomes conscious of "a certain ennoblement and elevation above mere sensibility to pleasure from impressions of sense."[35] Self-in-itself like a thing-in-itself is grounded upon the supersensible *a priori*, a noumenon whose analogical presentation in ennobling because it endows us with an intuition of there being something beyond mere phenomena, something which rhetorically presented as ground, is simultaneously posited on the level below the level of presentation, but whose intuitive realization moves us up, makes us transcend ourselves as only phenomenal. Judgements of taste restricted to the phenomenal sphere of our

[34] I. Kant, *The Critique...*, pp. 223—224.

[35] Quoted in P. Crowther, *The Kantian...*, p. 72.

experience are thus as it were extensions of the noumenal and the noumena functions as some pure origin which determines the judgements of taste exactly as the unwritten law. Hence taste, like in Burke, is both free and confined, universal and subjective. The phenomenal is not knowledge, let us repeat, but its rhetorical projection, a distortion of sorts, a "pseudo-knowledge" which is known as the aesthetic," as Eagleton phrases it.

> When, for Kant, we find ourselves concurring spontaneously in an aesthetic judgement, able to agree that a certain phenomenon is sublime or beautiful, we exercise a precious form of intersubjectivity, establishing ourselves as a community of feeling subjects linked by a quick sense of our shared capacities. The aesthetic is in no way cognitive, but it has about it something of the form and structure of the rational; it thus unites us with all the authority of a law, but at a more affective, intuitive level.[36]

This intuitive unification with the law, however, is based on the mechanism of the already mentioned framing of the sublime which is also done intuitively. Sublimity, like the law, resides in our minds rather then outside, in nature, and the fact that we are capable of judging something as sublime testifies, as we have seen, to the existence of the faculty to judge rather than to the existence of the sublime. This may sound like a total misreading of Kant's ideas, but it is really difficult not to see an affinity between the noumenal and the sublime in his theory.

Both the sublime and the noumenal are in themselves formless, unrepresentable, the difference being that the sublime is a projection of infinity while the noumenal can be intuited only as a law. The sublime is intuitively terrifying, the noumenal is pleasing, both being productive of the necessity of their rendition, or projection, on the level of the aesthetic as not presentable in themselves. They both meet on the level of mediation as symbols of something else, as neither this nor that, as a mixture of black and white, for instance, as to whose existence Burke had no doubts, but which he could not make present in his *Enquiry*. Simultaneously, however, the symbolic sphere of representation is the sphere which keeps the sublime and the noumenal apart thus positing both of them as uncategorisable categories in order to perceive which one really has to be endowed with another eye to see what Northrop Frye terms the "real reality" as opposed to the fake one available to us which the Romantics attempted to somehow do without:

> [...] the shadow of Kant's riddle falls across the whole Romantic movement. The world that we see and understand is not the noumenon, the world in itself, but

[36] T. Eagleton, *The Ideology...*, p. 75.

> only the world as phenomenon, as adapted to our categories of reasoning. The inference is that *real* reality, so to speak, cannot be known, at least by the subject object relationship.[37]

I shall shortly discuss the Romantic attempt at achieving an unmediated vision (Geoffery Hartman's term) taking Coleridge's writing as an example. Let us note here, however, that the riddle Frye talks about might actually be two riddles, or better, two in one — that of noumena and that of the sublime which Kant opens to an potential exploration exactly by rendering both as unrepresentable, and thus somehow present. As such, both spheres are really shadowy spheres which in fact mix into one and which, regardless of Kant's postulates, are rhetorically offered as presentable as another nature, as kind of super-nature in order to cope with which one has also to be equipped with a super-vision and a super-language transcending the already existing representations which, as analogous, do not, of course, penetrate into the worlds within and without. That the new, romantic vision discovers super-natural, infinite worlds of imagination simultaneously searching for their unity is but an imaginative reproduction of the sublime potentially being hidden in anything unrepresentable, in the "noumenal" law and order of things in themselves which, once rendered as accessible, become a nature which "is not at all natural but is an extra-ordinary, super-natural world, one that holds us at a distance and in awe," as Anthony Cascardi puts it.[38] The movement is thus not quite from the sublime to the natural, as the title of Cascardi's essay suggests, but from the aesthetic back to the sublime repressed by the artifice of representation, back to "unrepresentation."

Before we have a look at romanticism, which due to its traditional placement in the chronology of history can really be interpreted as an counter--discourse of Kant's system, let us read some texts in which a certain movement outside the confines of the aesthetic is also observable, but whose landscapes are still discernible only through the already represented, which are discernible through the eye, as Blake had it, without quite giving up "the guiding metaphors of the eye and sight" whose abandonment Cascardi more or less rightly sees (after Hartman) as the prerequisite of the romantic oxymoron of "unmediated vision"[39] in which we do not really see anything.

---

[37] N. Frye, *A Study of English Romanticism* (New York: Random House 1968), p. 84.

[38] A. J. Cascardi, "From the Sublime to the Natural: Romantic Responses to Kant," in *Literature and the Question of Philosophy*, A. J. Cascardi, ed. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1987), p. 115.

[39] Ibid.

VI

In Other Worlds (On Smith, Swedenborg, Blake and Godwin)

You may say I'm a dreamer...

John Lennon

You will say I too am a dreamer;

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

> There will be no war, no crimes, no administration of justice, as it is called, and no government. Beside this, there will be no disease, anguish, melancholy, nor resentment. Every man will seek, with ineffable ardour, the good of all.
>
> William Godwin

In his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) Adam Smith compares human society to a "beautiful and noble machine" in which

> whatever tended to render its movements more smooth and easy, would derive a beauty from this effect, and, on the contrary, whatever tended to obstruct them would displease in that account: so virtue, which is, as it were, the fine polish to the wheels of society, necessarily pleases; while vice, like the vile rust, which makes them jar and grate upon one another, is as necessarily offensive.[1]

Smith does not say who the one who tends, the mechanic, is but the "wheels of society" are, probably, individuals. The society is beautiful when it works

[1] A. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Oxford 1976), p. 316.

smoothly, without the interruption on the part of those wheels which have not been lubricated by virtue, on the part of the rusty ones which not only lack "the fine polish" but also, by their very presence within the mechanism, obstruct the smooth motions of its other parts.

Virtue is thus a kind of immaterial substance, a pure oil which fills in the spaces between the individuals so that they are not offensive to each other. What somehow personifies the wheels of the machine in Smith's metaphor is the feeling of pleasure which seems to be pleasing both for the "tender" of the machine as well as for its elements, members. The tender of the machine does not necessarily have to be external to the construction, a designer who, once having created it, only looks after its proper functioning by adding some virtue here and there so that the world smoothly goes on. If this was the case, all the blame for the mechanism's "malfunction" could be put on him. If anything, he has created the wheels, the individuals whose choice it is now to either function beautifully and pleasurably, or remain rusty and thus evil and uncomfortable both to themselves, and to the social mechanism.

Smith also compares society to more "aesthetic" an object than a machine, however beautiful and noble; to an orchestra: "the great pleasure of conversation and society [...] arises from a certain correspondence of sentiments and opinion, from a certain harmony of minds, which like so many musical instruments coincide and keep time with one another."[2] The virtue which harmonised the functioning of the machine is thus an object whose being appropriate (i.e. harmonious) can be verified only in comparison with other elements of the machine, with other instruments partaking of the production of the harmonious whole. The harmony, both that of the machine and that of the orchestra takes place outside the human body, it is the pleasurable sound of well tuned instruments, a correspondence of feelings and sentiments which, in order to correspond, must be more or less of the same order. It is not words used in conversation or correspondence which are pleasurably agreeable, but the uniform "sentiments and opinion" which they express. In this sense the virtue, the true sentiment also exists within man, constitutes man's kernel or soul which has to be only expressed by the body, let outside, as it were, and then takes part in the unison choir of the social orchestra.

Man, social man, "takes place" outside himself and the kernel of his soul is also somewhere else than himself because it can only be made available when externalized and matched against other externalized insides, other harmonious, virtuous feelings which populate the world. Smith's image of society is exactly that of **going outside oneself** to some collective marketplace and attuning oneself to the feelings of others. Rousseau writes about this kind

---

[2] Ibid., p. 337.

of transportation without recourse to a metaphor. We can be really free, natural citizens only provided that we are capable of

> transporting ourselves outside ourselves, and identifying ourselves with the suffering animal, leaving our being, so to speak, in order to take his [...] Thus no one becomes sensitive except when his imagination is animated and begins to transport himself outside himself.[3]

This going out of oneself must be done voluntarily in order that the social compact thus achieved is just and rightful. The name Rousseau gives to this transportation outside in *The Social Contract* (1762) is "alienation," or, rather, the verb "to alienate" which Rousseau quite explicitly defines: "To alienate is to give or to sell."[4] Selling oneself is slavery and this is exactly the principle of tyranny which buying one's liberty is free to dictate its arbitrary, external laws to the society. By selling himself man alienates himself from his freedom. He does goes out of himself, but cannot come back, as it were, because he now belongs to someone else. In order that the law is natural, and thus just, the individual should alienate himself by giving himself, and only himself. Yet he should not give himself, say, charitably, for nothing:

> To say that a man gives himself gratuitously is to say what is absurd and inconceivable; such an act is null and illegitimate, from the mere fact that he who does it is out of his mind. To say the same of a whole people is to suppose a people of madmen; and madness creates no right.[5]

Addison's going abroad oneself was both confined and gratified by beauty. In Rousseau the gratification, the pleasure seems to be that of the smooth, natural society. Going outside oneself for nothing is even worse than monarchy (selling oneself) because it leads to the chaos of anarchy in which there is a lot of freedom and nobody to be free. Pure charity is madness because it leads to the dissolution of the society through the dissolution of one's freedom to give oneself which is the instituting property of man as a social being. Hence the paradox of Rousseau's right to be free: one is free to be free only provided that one accepts it as an obligation and gives oneself for this purpose.

The property of liberty is human interest and duty, and he who renounces it either by selling himself or by giving himself without that interest in mind is no longer a human being: "To renounce liberty is to renounce being a man,

---

[3] J.-J. Rousseau, *Emile ou de l'education*, vol. IV (Paris 1961), p. 261. Quoted by T. Eagleton, *The Ideology...*, p. 24.

[4] J.-J. Rousseau, "The Social Contract," in *Les philosophes*, (N. L. Torrey, ed.), p. 146.

[5] Ibid., pp. 146–147.

to surrender the rights of humanity and even its duties."[6] Freedom is thus rendered as a virtue which is simultaneously a pleasurable gratification, and it is in the context of this virtue that Rousseau uses the word "sublime." "La plus sublime vertu est négative; elle nous instruit de ne jamais faire du mal à persone." If human interest is to be happy then giving oneself for happiness one must not do any harm to the freedom of others. Freedom must come from others who do not interfere in it — hence the necessity of going outside oneself, giving oneself and still remaining oneself. One has to remain oneself in order that others remain themselves within the agreeable whole of the society and one's going out of oneself must be limited to the sublime virtue of not doing harm to others, of lubricating, to return to Smith's metaphor for a while, the wheels of the machine without falling out of it, which could be disruptive for its working.

The sublime negative virtue of Rousseau is thus the highest point a man can reach if he wants to still remain a human being, and the transgression of this point, one's giving oneself disinterestedly, leads to the madness of nonbeing, to the dismantling of the mechanism in which there is nothing but, say, lubricants, a creation of the sphere of infinity conversant with either God or with nothing. Rousseau, like Addison, stops short of that sphere confining sublimity to the pleasure and virtue of being oneself for the sake of oneself and others rendering the sphere at whose sight Addison's imagination stops in its working as a nothingness of madness rather than divinity.

Once such sphere has been pointed to, however, even as nothingness, its very possibility will both frighten and attract the human mind. It is the Age of Reason which, however paradoxically, opens up this sphere to human exploration. Its reason is reason itself which does not tolerate the unreasonable. Since, as we have seen in Addison, reason itself is productive of the spheres of infinity hardly accessible to man, reason becomes suspicious of itself and begins to explore, reasonably, the spheres it declares alien to it, the aesthetic spheres of feeling and sensibility which, once opened, begin to threaten with unreason and have to be reasonably closed down at a certain point, be it that of beauty, as in Addison, or that of one's negative, sublime, virtue.

The liberating rhetoric of the discourse of feeling which promises the eventual naturalization of the human condition, as well as equality, freedom, harmony and happiness almost always stops short at the border of the sublime which is rendered as unlimited and simultaneously posited exactly as the border. The transgression of this border means the transgression of the sphere which has been delimited for humanity and becomes the sphere of the "possessed" who talk with Gods, like Blake or Swedenborg, who seek life

[6] Ibid., p. 146.

in death, like the Graveyard poets, or of hardly classifiable anarchists like Godwin whose contact with society, as we shall see, takes place on another planet, in the future of immortality. It is not the novel which the eighteenth century really offers us as a novelty. It is the novelty of the sublime which it promises and takes away exactly by means of what is novel, by means of the aesthetic pleasures of the mind which, thus liberated, will believe in its own freedom within the limits thus delineated.

Rousseau's "giving oneself" is thus giving oneself for oneself which is simultaneously the only way toward a happy society. About 1766 Emanuel Swedenborg will go a step farther and ask whether such an "interested" kind of giving is not a pretence of benevolence and will suggest not only that one should be charitable, but that the human being is born to become charity itself. Rousseau's going out of oneself is actually done for the sale of negotiating social justice with other selves, preferably on the level of the exchange of natural feelings, of the natural, musical harmony which pre-exists language. His banishment of writing to the sphere of the supplement of speech is obviously dictated by the necessity of signing the social contract naturally, without any interference of the convention of writing. It is one's very presence within the territory of a society which is the expression of one's will to participate in the state thus commenced. In this sense expression, writes Derrida, "is the expression of affect, of the passion at the origin of language, of a speech that was first substituted for song, marked by *tone* and *force*."[7] The society should be, as in Smith's metaphor, musically attuned in a choir of pure sounds which express nothing but themselves, the purity of their free beings with nothing but desire to become parts of a larger whole.

Swedenborg makes no explicit reference to Rousseau in his unfinished sketch on charity, but since the idea of the harmonious choir of feelings is somehow reminiscent of Angelic choirs with whom Swedenborg, as is well known, used to communicate, and since there seems to be a certain, say, "negative affinity of ideas" in the two thinkers, let us have a brief look at Swedenborg's text.

Already in the second sentence of *De charitate* (1766) Swedenborg says something quite contrary to Rousseau's idea of wills of the citizens totalized within the general will of the state. "A man's own will is nothing but evil. Unless he is reformed and regenerated, therefore, he not only remains as he was born, but even becomes worse, adding to the evils which he received hereditarily others done on his own account."[8] The original sin is thus

---

[7] J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. Spivak (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1976), p. 314.

[8] E. Swedenborg, *Charity*, translated from Latin by W. F. Wunsch (New York: Swedenborg Foundation 1982), p. 27.

that of our free will and Swedenborg's "regeneration" consists in our renunciation of it. Swedenborg does not write about "free will," but about one's "own will" thus allowing man some freedom: "Lord can remove evils if the man, for his part, tries to remove them."[9] The will to remove sins and evil from us is thus not man's own will (this is nothing but evil), which puts man in a peculiar predicament; he has to willingly, "for his part," renounce his own will. The pleasure of one's own will, and hence of one's own being and being free is a pleasure of self-love, which is evil:

> All evils are born pleasurable, for we are born into self-love, and this love makes pleasurable all our own, all we ourselves will and think. Moreover, unless the pleasures of evil which are rooted in us from birth are conquered, we remain in them to the end of life. They are conquered only if thought of as agreeable poisons which kill, or as seemingly beautiful but poison-bearing flowers; in other words, only if they are regarded as deathdealing, and this until they turn undelightful.[10]

The oxymoron of the "agreeable poison" is, like any oxymoron, a paradox. The oxymoron of "free bondage" in thinkers like Rousseau is also agreeable and pleasurable, it should lead to a pleasurable kind of life in a just and virtuous society. Addison's "delightful horror," or Burke's sublime, "pleasing terror" are also oxymorons and they are also productive of the agreeable pleasures of the beautiful, of liberation of the mind. Elevating the discourse to the level of the "sublime of theology" (the term "sublime" is loaded with overt religious associations in the eighteenth century)[11] Swedenborg actually reverts all the aesthetic and political pleasures into horrors. "Agreeable poison" is deadly exactly for the reason that it is agreeable. Pleasures are thus misleading and the beautiful atonement and at-one-ment of the social orchestra are but the hissings of the devil which must be recognized as such in order that we have a glimpse at the eternity and immortality of God. Charity, which in its pure form is, for Rousseau, madness, constitutes in Swedenborg the only way to go out of oneself and leave oneself behind, as it were.

Mr Allworthy defines charity in *Tom Jones* (1749) as a virtue hardly attainable by humans because close to the spheres of angelic choirs: "that sublime Christian-like disposition, that vast elevation of thought, in purity approaching to angelic perfection, to be attained, expressed, and felt only by grace."[12] Once man found a secure location inside his ego, he became isolated from the sublime spheres which have become available only to grace.

---

[9] Ibid., p. 27.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Cf. A. Wilson, *Turner and the Sublime* (London: British Museum Publications 1980), p. 12.

[12] Cf. H. Fielding, *Tom Jones*, Book II, Ch. V.

"God exists, but he is out of reach," as J. Hillis Miller puts it commenting on an Arthur Hugh Clough poem. "Modern times begin," he says, "when man confronts his isolation, his separation from everything outside himself [...] with the inner experience of the isolated self" which can be traced back to Montaigne and Descartes, and which results in the feeling of the absence of God, in "a radical sense of inner nothingness."[13] Rousseau's man, as we have seen, does go out of himself, but he does so egoistically, in order to actually confine himself by natural law, to isolate himself from the approaches of the sublime which are destructive of order, beauty and harmony. Addison's aesthetic sublime is also the religious sublime which is only a reminder of the presence of God in the sense of the Derridean *restance* — something which remains and is simultaneously left over.[14] The polite imagination does not explore the sublime and is only awakened by its approaches in order to be capable of creating a "finished" beauty. Swedenborg, having transgressed the finitude of the beautiful, transposes the discourse to the elevated sphere of godlike sublimity from whose perspective human beauty is a horrible beauty.

We do good things in this world, but these good things are actually evil as long as we have not noticed and repented ourselves from our own will which is the root of evil within us.

> Evil is inwardly in us then, not opened, and therefore not cured, and real good cannot issue from evil — the fountain is impure. Good which issues from evil may wear the appearance of good, but in it is the man such as he is inwardly.[15]

The problem consists in distinguishing good from evil with a spiritual eye rather than with the human eye, as what seems to be good may eventually turn out to be evil. The verification, however, can be done from either an angelic perspective, or on one's death. Rousseau's image of man outside himself is used quite explicitly by Swedenborg here:

> All we do is an image of us. Before the angels a man is thus imaged forth, quite outside himself; I have seen it a thousand times. [...] on death, when we are let into our inner nature, this good [done in bodily act] is taken away, and there is undisguised evil instead.[16]

Swedenborg speaks to us from the position of one endowed with a different kind of seeing reminiscent of Blake's ability to see "through the eye" rather

---

[13] M. J. Hillis, *The Disappearance of God* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press 1975), pp. 7–8.

[14] J. Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. B. Johnson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1981), p. 8.

[15] E. Swedenborg, *Charity*, p. 29.

[16] Ibid., pp. 30–31.

than with one. Swedenborg's "semiology" is not very different from that of the sentimental writings in which feeling, as John Mullan puts it, "is above all observable," where "tears, blushes and sighs — and a range of postures and gestures — reveal conditions of feeling which can connote exceptional virtue or allow for intensified forms of communication."[17] Swedenborg's semiology is, additionally, an angelic kind of semiology which can tell, say, heaven from hell. Man can differentiate it only on his death, when his outside (i.e. whatever he does) is turned inside and when it is already too late to be good. In order to be really good man has to die during his lifetime, to achieve the angelic, spiritual insight into his inside which is done by means of repentance. This repentance consists in purifying ourselves from the originary evil which is, exactly, ourselves, our own will and thus give ourselves to the Lord charitably, without any interest in ourselves. Then we can be endowed with the divine nature because the Lord will simply replace the devil within us:

> [...] before repentance there is no charity of which the good is from the Lord, but from the man, but after repentance it becomes charity of which the good is not from the man but from the Lord. The Lord cannot enter a man and Himself accomplish any good through him before the Devil, that is evil, has been ejected, but only after he has been ejected, which is effected by repentance.[18]

The paradox is that in order to repent one has to have already repented, achieved the gift of seeing through oneself outside and discovered the devil in what he thought was good. Only having repented can one be good and see the good, otherwise he will be doing good which is from man, and hence from the devil within: "Good before repentance is not good."[19] The world does not know about goods done without repentance being evil, "but the fact is manifest after death."[20] Swedenborg moves here the moment of the revelation of truth from "on death" till "after death" thus inscribing death within life as the possibility of another life, a life after life of sorts, within the natural life as an impossible possibility, as a possibility of being oneself which one has to repent and thus no longer be oneself — a being, like Swedenborg, outside oneself which sees through oneself, whose "all [...] utterance resounds with the evil which is in one. Good before repentance is entirely self-regarding."[21]

---

[17] J. Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability. The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1988), p. 201.

[18] E. Swedenborg, *Charity*, p. 31.

[19] Ibid., p. 33.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., p. 34.

Swedenborg's good after repentance is thus a kind of being in the future, within the sphere yet absent to the senses of "the natural man." It is exactly this natural aspect of man which Swedenborg desires to leave behind in the world of sin and go outside himself towards the realm of the spiritual still trying to, however vainly, preserve the continuity between the two worlds. This continuity is implicitly suggested in the very possibility of having written the book on charity addressed to people from the position of one who "a thousand times" had the pleasure of seeing both himself and others from the other side, from the position of an angel. In other words, the sublime can be beautiful provided its beauty is of a different order. Good in its fullness, the really charitable one, is endowed with such adjectives as "lovely, innocent, pleasing," with the adjectives we have seen in the description of some more mundane spheres, but the last of the adjectives which modify it is "heavenly," which, of course, redefines all the beauties and pleasures Swedenborg is writing about ("Good after repentance is utterly different. It is good in its fullness, unimpeded from the Lord Himself; it is lovely, innocent, pleasing, heavenly").[22] If the natural beings are endowed with the bodies whose movements signify their internal infernos, the spiritual ones silently breathe out their divine origin. Goodness after repentance

> is living, shaped by truth. [...] It puts away self, that is, evil, with every breath. In form it is like lovely flower, beautifully colored, glistening in the sun's rays. With those in *good*, therefore, there are forms of life which can never be comprehended by the natural man; they are unimaginable and cannot be described.[23]

The natural being is evil as a self while goodness consists in putting the self away, in putting away one's presence in the world as self-identity. A good, spiritual being identifies itself only with the divine which its natural counterpart cannot comprehend or visualise, it is a living dead of sorts which sees the evil of the carcass which it has already put away and goes outside itself charitably, actually disintegrating in the infinity of the divine. This identification with the divine is also an identification with the sublime, the highest possible disintegration in which the horrible or terrible of the sublime is rendered as infinitely pleasurable while the pleasures of the beautiful, of the natural and human become desublimated and put away to the hell of mundane existence.

A similar idea of charity comes from Christopher Smart, a poet who spent a few years in a madhouse only to die in prison for debts. Human charity, in Smart, is the ability to partake in the charity of God which, or who, is in fact

---

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

a nonidentity. "For God nevertheless is an extravagant BEING and generous unto loss;" he writes in *Jubilate Agno* (manuscript discovered in 1939) simultaneously, in the next line of this peculiar text, punningly endowing human beings with this generosity by inscribing it into the word "generation": "For there is no profit in the generation of man."[24] Human charity comes from the charity of God who nothing but gives, who gives unto loss of Himself as an object of worship thus disseminating this nonidentity upon men who, in turn, rather than profiting from that generosity, should dissolve in the activity of prayer unto loss for practicing which Smart was confined in a private madhouse.

Disinterested charity leads to the loss of person and Swedenborg's "theory" of neighbour leads, of course, to the disintegration of both person and society as "bodily" creatures and their re-integration on the level of goodness which functions, as we have seen, on the levels of sublimity inaccessible to natural man. "A society is the neighbor because it is a composite man,"[25] writes Swedenborg, but it does not mean that it is other persons with whom one "neighbours" within this composite being. "Good is the neighbor," and it is this neighbourhood of goodness which constitutes the spiritual community of equally good spirits rather than men:

> One individual is not the neighbor more than another merely in the point of person, but as to the good from which he is the man he is.[26]

Without an angelic insight we cannot tell a good man from an evil one just as we cannot really distinguish between good and bad societies (composite men). The reason for this is that "in the course of time man has become external, having turned away from love to the Lord to wisdom."[27] Rousseau's going outside oneself as a gesture of liberating one's natural self is misleading for Swedenborg because the body obstructs the true externalization of the spirit. Man has become external and all he is capable of perceiving are signs which belong to the level of understanding and reason. The external man can be blind to the evil within him and think himself good because his inside has been separated from him. It is again one's death which has to be experienced in order that one can really see his inside and thus verify whether there is a true neighbour within. Only angels are internal men and their goodness speaks through their bodies:

---

[24] *The Poetical Works of Christopher Smart*, K. Willimason, ed. (Oxford 1980), B 380, B 381. I discuss the question of identity in Christopher Smart in more detail in my *Word and Confinement. Subjectivity in 'Classical' Discourse* (Katowice: Uniwersytet Śląski 1992).

[25] E. Swedenborg, *Charity*, p. 53.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., p. 61.

> An angel in heaven appears as charity embodied. The character of the charity is visible in the face and audible in the voice. For after death we become our love, that is, our love's affection. A spirit or angel is nothing else. Indeed the spirit or angel is a form of charity as to the whole body.[28]

Good has thus the form and the body of a spirit in order to see which one has to be a Swedenborg who speaks to us from the position of a living person who has already died and communed with angels. Without such persons there would be nobody to inform us about the possibility of our having become external and thus a society which only seems to be a smoothly working mechanism, like in Smith's metaphor opening this chapter, and actually is being misled by that smoothness which has been achieved exactly by our externalization to the point of becoming blind to the truly sublime inside. We might be good, but we can never be certain of it unless there are really "sincere men" among us who, like Swedenborg, will keep an internal eye on us and will try to recognize who is who. Even if there are such persons, however, the absolute certainty has to wait till the time they become angels:

> Still a sincere man with no thoughts contrary to charity can be recognized by face and voice, though with some difficulty because there are hypocrites who can feign charity's sincerity, and ideed put it on, to the life. If, however, an angel inspects the face and listens to the voice he knows what a man's quality is, not beholding the material mask, to which the material man attends.[29]

Swedenborg's speculations on the alternative world of the alternative good beings only potentially dwelling with us verges, as it seems, not so much on his certainty concerning its existence as on the extreme scepticism as to the existence of this world. Swedenborg goes a step farther then Descartes, and by questioning the positivity of thinking one's "I" as uncharitable and thus coming from the devil, and by questioning thinking in general as susceptible to error and falsity moves the world to the spheres of sublimity inaccessible to human understanding because posited outside that understanding. If Addison's imagination stopped short in the face of the infinite spheres beyond its capacity, Swedenborg's discourse stops short in the face of any finitude and sends it to hell and the Devil with which Swedenborg's communication, unlike that with the angels, seems to be limited. This false world and hell are one and the same thing which due to human confinement to oneself, reason or thinking is rendered as the obstacle in one's journey to infinity, to the truly sublime sphere which is quite explicitly rendered as the sphere of death of this life.

---

[28] Ibid., p. 62.

[29] Ibid.

It is the one-sidedness of this sublimity that Blake finds intolerable in Swedenborg. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790) Blake reads Swedenborg as hardly original and actually false:

> Now hear a plain fact: Swedenborg has not written one new truth. Now hear another: he has written old falsehoods.
>
> And now hear the reason. He conversed with angels, who are all religious, and conversed not with devils who all hate religion, for he was incapable through his conceited notions.
>
> Thus Swedenborg's writings are a recapitulation of all superficial opinions and an analysis of the more sublime, but no further.[30]

Paradoxical as it may seem, Blake accusses Swedenborg of not being sublime enough, of stepping toward "the more sublime" rather than the sublimest. Swedenborg is wrong and no different from other thinkers, a commentator of "already published books," because he confines his disputes to angels ignoring devils and thus subscribing himself to those authors who claim that soul and body are two distinct, separable things. Swedenborg "only holds a candle in sunshine"[31] thus heralding only a faint part of the truth which must be supplemented with "the Bible of Hell — which the world shall have whether they will or no."[32] Swedenborg heralds only one world, a peaceful sphere of at least imaginary coexistence which, for Blake, is too limited because too peaceful, warding off the other world of Hell which translates the world into a being which is more than one: "the *world* shall have whether *they* will or no" [italics added]. Beyond "the more sublime" spheres of Swedenborg's angels is the eternal delight of energy and life. As Tadeusz Sławek notices,

> Since Blake himself says "Enough or too much" [...], and "you never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough" [...] his definition of life must be based on some kind of surplus. A life seen within the horizon of the copy elevated to the original, a sexual union *aufgehoben* to virginity, is a reduplication of itself, is an endless repetition, self-commentary of a phenomenon upon itself. What is perceived from the outside as life is only an excess of life within a phenomenon, this life in what Blake calls "Corporeal Vegetation" is a surplus of life in "Eternity."[33]

Blake's life has thus to go out of itself towards a certain absence of the surplus which constitutes an appendix of life, a dangerous supplement, as Derrida

---

[30] W. Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," in *Blake. The Complete Poems*, W. H. Stevenson, ed. (London and New York: Longman 1989), pp. 119—120.

[31] Ibid., p. 120.

[32] Ibid., p. 121.

[33] T. Sławek, *The Outlined Shadow. Phenomenology, Grammatology, Blake* (Katowice: Uniwersytet Śląski 1985), pp. 124—125.

would phrase it, of the Bible of Hell which as it were overgrows the sphere of eternity in which "one Thing never changes into another Thing. Each Identity is Eternal."[34] Swedenborg is only more sublime than other 'uninspired' writers because his sphere of Eternity is deprived of the sphere of growth and energy and rendered as false from top to bottom. Swedenborg is blind to garment, to outline, to the body which, as contrary to eternity and the promised "Naked Human form divine," are productive of the progression which without contraries is unthinkable for Blake. Eternity and vegetation are two different things, but not quite separate things and it is through vegetation that we can progress toward the eternal identity of us and things. Mere dualism always separates, is productive of distinctions which Blake condemns as deadly though he constantly makes use of them. Presenting Swedenborg as "the angel sitting at the tomb; his writings are the linen clothes folded up"[35] he presents him as a deadly figure whose nakedness has nothing to do with the human body. Men are not heavenly angels and the angel Blake converses with in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is the one "who is now become a devil" and is Blake's "particular friend. We often read the Bible together in its infernal or diabolical sense, which the world shall have if they behave well."[36] Ambiguity as to any contraries is built into Blake's vision of the world as an irreducible contamination or extension of the glorious whole and makes it impossible to classify him as either a dualist or a monist which forces Leopold Damrosch to oxymoronically classify his thought as "dualistic monism" or "troubled dualism."[37] What is at stake in Blake is thus not the idea of the reconciliation of the opposites, which is (as Damrosch believes Blake saw with increasing clarity) "really no advance at all over the complacent Augustan notion of concordia discors."[38] The reason why he deals with contraries at all is "not that reality presents itself as a harmony of opposites, but rather that an inescapable experience of pain and struggle is fundamental to any achievement."[39] Rather than an "isthmus" created by the denial and withdrawal from the stormy seas of the other Blake's man lives in the state of the incessant extension whose other name is "emanation" and whose emancipation from man is comparable to Eve's having been left by herself by Adam and thus becoming the cause of the fall of both. Emanation or expansion are the female principle which, once separated from the male one, is wholly possessed by the devil and thus proclaims the kingdom

---

[34] Quoted in ibid., p. 125.

[35] W. Blake, *Blake. The Complete Poems*, p. 105.

[36] Ibid., p. 121.

[37] Cf. L. Damrosch Jr., *Symbol and Truth in Blake's Myth* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1980), p. 175.

[38] Ibid., p. 176.

[39] Ibid., p. 177.

of the devil in which woman is endowed with a will, something unthinkable in Blake's "Eternity."[40] If Swedenborg divorces heaven and hell by propagating the realm of angels alone, Blake's Milton does exactly the reverse:

> The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of angels and God, and at liberty when of devils and Hell, is because he was a true poet, and the Devil's party without knowing it.[41]

Milton, like Swedenborg, praised eternal death though he did not quite realize it. Milton, in *Paradise Lost* (1667), inscribed Satan within Eve even before she was tempted exactly as the idea of separation from Adam, and hence as the separation of heaven from hell. It is in fact Eve who tempts Adam to separate before she eats of the fruit:

> Let us divide our labors, thou where choice
> Leads thee, or where most needs [...] while I
> In yonder spring of roses intermixed
> With myrtle, find what to redress till noon.
>
> *Paradise Lost*, Book IX

In *Milton*, Milton realizes that what he unknowingly propagated was "eternal death" which Blake sees engraved upon him in the poem:

> The whole assembly wept prophetic, seeing in Milton's face
> And his lineaments divine the shades of Death and Ulro.
> He took off the robe of the promise & ungirded himself
> from the oath of God.[42]

Milton is thus naked of "the oath of God" and has to be reborn because he is, paradoxically, not quite naked form the divine but, like Homer, Ovid, Plato or Cicero whose writings are "stolen and perverted", a slave of the sword ("Shakespeare and Milton were both curbed by the general malady and infection from the silly Greek and Latin slaves of the sword")[43] which actually represses the divine inspiration and imagination leaving man alone defenseless and naked in the hands of the devil alone. There is a divine sphere in Milton, but having made man passive by separating heaven from hell Milton is only a copist and not a real author. The muse which dictated Milton's writings was, like that of Ovid or Homer, "a daughter of Mnemosyne, or Memory, and not of Inspiration or Imagination" and for

---

[40] Cf. ibid., p. 182.
[41] W. Blake, "The Marriage...," p. 107.
[42] W. Blake, "Milton," in *Blake. The Complete Poems*, p. 508.
[43] Ibid., p. 490.

this reason, as a copist of memory, Milton is not an author of "sublime conceptions."[44] Infected by Greek and Roman models, Milton's writings "are set up by artifice against the sublime of the Bible"[45] whose sublimity consists, as we have seen, in its being supplemented with the Bible of Hell not as a separate book and realm of the Devil but the Bible's own emanation authored by inspiration and imagination which make us capable of transgressing the memory of our fall and "see the worlds of eternity in which we shall live for ever" in the active becoming ourselves in which there is no final destination, unveiling or consummation because the end of this activity means giving up to the passivity of a pure presence which, in Blake, is also the presence of death and the denial of eternity.

Blake's sublime is thus the sphere of eternal authorship of becoming, of overwriting ourselves in which the garment of writing, like that of the Bible, must be incessantly supplemented so as it does not end up in a finished text, but constitutes the sphere of activity which disables the separation of the already written Bible of Mnemosyne and the "being written" Bible of the Hell. It is only in this activity that sublimity is being constantly revived and thus inseparably attached to every grain of sand as infinity, as the surplus of its presence, the irreducible "going out" of things whose end is the end of infinity and hence death. Blake's sublime is thus not exactly infinite, but neither is it limited so as to be made agreeable to human imagination. Rather, it is the sublime of the everchanging or evergrowing contour which does promise the pleasurable dome of divinity, but promises it through the painful and arduous action of becoming, of writing and engraving upon our own human forms divine so as not to make them purely present (hence dead to eternity) and thus passive tools in the hands of the "slaves of the sword" who will carve the spheres of ourselves and our freedoms by themselves. Milton's sublime is as it were external to himself, to Milton who, as Harold Bloom phrases it, "does stand outside his own Sublime."[46] Milton stands outside his own writing presenting Satan, endowing him with his poetic genius, and simultaneously renouncing, or not realising, his (Milton's) being of "the Devil's party." Milton's Satan, says Bloom,

> is a great rhetorician, and nearly as strong a poet as Milton himself, but more important he is Milton's central way through to the Sublime. As such, Satan prophesies the post-Enlightenment crisis-poem, which has become our modern Sublime.[47]

---

[44] Ibid., p. 490 (quotation from *Descriptive Catalogue*).

[45] Ibid.

[46] H. Bloom, *Poetry and Repression. Revisionism from Blake to Stevens* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1976), p. 23.

[47] Ibid., p. 23.

Milton prophesies a marriage of heaven and hell with a burning sword in his hand throwing the fallen man outside the paradise and promising a return there only after the Devil has been conquered, after the rhetoric he has given him gives way to the naked beautiful and glorious truth he glorifies in *Areopagitica*. It is thus not exactly Milton but Satan, the rhetorician, who actually represses the truth, but through whose repression the naked truth is promised. Truth becomes sublimated through repression, through the rhetorical work of the Devil who, against Milton's exorcisms, incorporates his cunning work into the discourse of truth exactly by his being posited as what Bloom calls a "Counter-Sublime,"[48] as the repression of the otherwise sublime sphere of truth whose declared beauty is thinkable as beautiful only "through" the repression of the devil. Those who desire to annihilate the devil, who claim the goodness of human nature to be either present or recoverable without the devil are, for Blake, the enemies of life eternal, of the truly sublime of which the counter-sublime is both emanation and limit, people confined to themselves without any excess and thus objects both blind to the devil and such that can be easily used by the devil in order to produce the machine of the society, for instance.

What prompted this longish digression concerning Blake was Rousseau's idea of "going out of oneself" which, in Rousseau, stood upon the "ungivable" presence of onself and which, in Blake, seems to be exactly a kind of digression, a going away from the main route and still remaining upon it in the way Sterne's travellers go to Rome, for instance, digressing about the problem of baptizing unborn children within the male seed. In *Jerusalem* (1804—1820) and elsewhere Blake digresses about Rousseau seeing him as a "Pharisee, a hypocrite, a pretender to virtue, and one who, whatever his theory of natural goodness in actual life, discovered only evil in men and who in long life found no friend", as Jean Hagstrum puts it.[49] In other words, Blake reads Rousseau as yet another "prophet" of eternal death, not quite different from Milton.

Very much like in Rousseau, however, this capability of going out of oneself, which Blake gives the names of the kind of "emanation" or "exuberance," is the characteristic of human liberty in *Jerusalem*:

> (In great Eternity, every particular form gives forth or emanates
> Its own peculiar light, & the form is the Divine Vision;
> And the light is his garment. This is Jerusalem in every man,
> A tent & tabernacle of mutual forgiveness, male & female
> clothings.
> And Jerusalem is called LIBERTY among the children of Albion.)[50]

---

[48] Ibid., p. 24.

[49] J. H. Hagstrum, "William Blake Rejects the Enlightenment," in *Blake. A Collection of Critical Essays*, N. Frye, ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall 1966), p. 152.

[50] W. Blake, "Jerusalem," in *Blake. The Complete Poems*, pp. 742—743.

This garment of light as an external emanation peculiar to everything is simultaneously internal, a tent and tabernacle of forgiveness. It is the idea of "forgiveness" which seems to be responsible for the gap between Rousseau and eternity, for the "hypocritical" kind of liberty he proposes. There is no room for forgiveness in Rousseau's state because going out of oneself one only compares oneself with the others and produces a more or less universal law common to all the human outsides who have to naturally level all the difference in order to harmoniously coexist. Once this is negotiated, any exuberant going out will be transgressive and subject to punishment by the law. The creation of the law is thus the negotiation of forgiveness. In the great eternity of Blake's Jerusalem such a limiting intervention is disruptive to the true individuality, it covers everybody's and everything's peculiar light with a layer of "hoar-frost" thus extinguishing the fire of energy and subduing it to the "reasoning power of man" which domesticates the tigers of wrath.

This is actually the fate of Albion who fell down and over whom rose "the spectre like a hoar-frost & mildew" thus stopping the growth to eternity and saying:

> "I am God, O sons of men! I am your rational power!
> Am I not Bacon & Newton & Locke who teach humility to man,
> Who teach doubt & experiment? And my two wings, Voltaire, Rousseau?[51]

The extinction of the peculiar, individual fire does not only limit oneself to oneself but it also breeds pestilence ("mildew"), like those who restrain desire but act not from *The Proverbs of Hell.* The individuals thus confined are both humble and humiliated. With limited individuals the eternity is also limited and thus no eternity at all, an eternity of Swedenborg's angels who have to die in order to see another world. Blake does not want to see any other worlds in the world of eternity which he sees in everything except Rousseau, for instance, and except all those who want to dictate pretending that they don't do it, who go out without going out, who forgive without forgiving, who only half-open the doors of perception in order to lock (or Locke) them for good.

In order to build a New Jerusalem, putting things bluntly, man has to reconstruct himself by deconstructing himself, by becoming a free, ever-expanding, unrestrained particular of eternity. On the social plane this is clearly the image of an uncoordinated society where it is exactly co-ordination, legislation or any kind of external organization which disorganizes the state of eternity. Topographically, Blake posits a world which is situated

[51] Ibid., pp. 743—744.

both here and there, a world of eternal growth and change which is the sphere of eternal life because it also incorporates death. Blake's world begins (though "begin" is not quite proper a word here) where Addison's imagination stops in its working; Blake's imagination transgresses the limits of infinity imposed by Addison's imagination. An individual, an infinite one, who lives both here and there, is of course hardly an institutional or civil kind of creature and bringing it, say, down to earth, to one place or an orchestra in which he should play beautiful, harmonious tunes seems to be hardly possible.

Yet such an attempt seems to be the undertaking of William Godwin in his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793). Godwin's individual is put in motion by a kind of pleasure principle which he calls "self-love." It is a paradoxical kind of self-love because it is based on the perfection of the mind which "consists in disinterestedness."[52] Godwin does realize that the "system of self-love" might be easily accused of the impossibility of the existence of virtue in it. For this reason the principle of self-love must be accompanied by that of benevolence:

> If self-love be the only principle of action, there can be no such thing as virtue. Benevolent intention is essential to virtue.[53]

Godwin goes a step behind Rousseau's "interested" giving oneself to society with the sublime virtue of not doing harm to anybody else. Rousseau was, according to Godwin, the most benevolent of those philosophers whose systems "taught them to look upon their fellow men as thus perverse and unjust" and who, for this reason, "have been frequently cold in their temper, or narrow in their designs."[54] The two accusations of Rousseau's system are of course reminiscent of Blake's obsession with the narrowness of limits imposed upon liberty and the hoar-frost covering Albion. The principle of self-love itself is also a version of Blake's restrained desire which breeds pestilence. Godwin's Rousseau has been only "driven to the place the perfection of virtue in doing no injury."[55] This negative, or passive virtue was the terror of submission to the tyranny of reason on to being confined to oneself for Blake. Godwin, using rhetoric hardly reminiscent of Blake, also desires to prompt us to action, to a practice of virtue which the philosophers merely talk about and impose upon us "by foreign and frivolous considerations." If Rousseau's man had an interest in himself, the self-loving individual of Godwin is disinterestedly benevolent, he loves himself for

---

[52] W. Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (Penguin Books 1985), p. 388.
[53] Ibid., p. 385.
[54] Ibid., p. 387.
[55] Ibid.

others, he goes outside himself beyond the point of the interest of his identity (the activity which was, we must remember, nothing but madness for Rousseau).

> The system of disinterested benevolence proves to us that it is possible to be virtuous, and not merely to talk about virtue [...] when we call upon mankind to divest themselves of selfish and personal considerations, we call upon them for something they are able to practise. An idea like this reconciles us to our species; teaches us to regard [...] the men who have appeared *to lose the feeling of their personal existence*, in the pursuit of general advantage [italics added].[56]

The reconciliation with our species is thus based upon a certain benevolent deconstruction of oneself which, in turn, is based on the internal virtue which must be spontaneously exteriorised. Spontaneously, because any external influence upon this externalization is disruptive of the principle of self-love. The "generous and magnanimous sentiments of our natures" must not be excited by any imposed laws, rules or teachers. All institutional teaching is contrary to human nature which knows good by itself, it is contrary to the interest of mankind and must be "unlearned before we can begin to be wise" and not remain "in a state of perpetual pupilage."[57]

We have to unlearn even ourselves to the point of absolute co-identification with others, to the point where self-love is the love of all selves provided those selves also unlearn themselves. Our mind must be "vindicated" to the state in which the most sublime virtue is not only that of leaving others intact, but of rejoicing "in the good that is done by others, as if it were done by ourselves."[58] Needless to say that Godwin also rejects private property as the basis of social organization. He mentions Plato's *Republic* and More's *Utopia* in a footnote praising them for their "proper mode of reasoning" but adding that "they knew not how to remove the difficulties that attended" the imperfections of their systems.[59] More's Utopia was a state whose beginning was the conquest of Sansculotians by Utopos and thus an imposed system. The system suggested by Godwin is better because it is the emanation of goodness from within us which, ideally, will annihilate private property including the property of being ourselves because this property, at least in Rousseau's version, is achieved by limitation and imitation, we limit ourselves by imitating others whom we meet outside ourselves.

In Godwin, as in Blake, being is constant becoming, a constant "unlearning" of the being progressing towards an eventual perfection of one's mind

---

[56] Ibid., p. 388.
[57] Ibid., pp. 615–616.
[58] Ibid., p. 389.
[59] Ibid., p. 729.

and reason which has to be achieved independently of others, without institutional education which teaches us how to mime others and thus endows its mimetic products with the status of being. Hence the image of society as a harmonious machinery or an orchestra playing the same tune is unwelcome to Godwin. A self-loving individual cannot confine himself or herself to being which leads to stagnation and inequality, or to a disciplinary equality imposed by the law and not by one's nature. Godwin's equality consists in being equally unequal, different and the same in difference, in becoming different. The condemnation of social mimesis and law leads Godwin to mixing sentiments and feelings:

> If you cannot bring over the hearts of the community to your party, expect no success from brute regulations. If you can, regulation is unnecessary. [...] Govern them through no medium but that of inclination and persuasion.[60]

Rather than teaching others the new individual, we should speak to his heart in order to persuade it to open itself to the truth of the persuader to which it is nevertheless already inclined. This inclination is elsewhere in the *Enquiry* called mental strength or natural reason as opposed to the reason imposed from above or abroad. Since there are, as ever, those endowed with the latter kind of reason, the ones who simply will not be persuaded, the declared equality of the unequal has to somehow cope with them, and it does. He who resigns himself wholly to "imitation can possess little of mental strength and accuracy. [...] He lives forgetting and forgot. He has deserted his station in human society. Mankind cannot be benefited by him."[61]

However mundane Godwin's speculations may seem if compared with Swedenborg's, another species of man is quite evidently at stake in Godwin's society, a species of disinterestedly benevolent creatures whose repentance of the evils of the world given to them endows them with the status of members of the society to which others have no access. Unlike Swedenborg's angels, however, they do not live in perfect harmony but, rather, in constant pain of becoming, progressively improving themselves. Yet some paradise of the eventual "uniformity of judgement" is promised by Godwin:

> The ideas, associations and circumstances of each man are properly his own; and it is a pernicious system that would lead us to require all men, however different their circumstances, to act by a precise general rule. Add to this that, by the doctrine of progressive improvement, we shall always be erroneous, though we shall every day become less erroneous. The proper method for hastening the decline of error,

[60] Ibid., p. 756.

[61] Ibid., p. 757.

> and producing uniformity of judgement, is not by brute force, by laws, or imitation; but, on the contrary, by exciting every man to think for himself.[62]

The eternal "always" of our being erroneous is somehow limited as the production of uniformity of judgement seems to be the teleological aim of the diminishing of the sphere of error within ourselves. An individual can be really individual only without any society, without any other persons trying to restrain or bend one's mind to another's. Uniformity of judgement is thus, ideally, thinkable only within one person and the only thinkable "republic" the republic of a singular man. Society cannot thus be a mechanism or an orchestra, however smoothly functioning, however harmoniously playing:

> For example: shall we have concerts of music? The miserable state of mechanism, of the majority of performers is so conspicuous as to be, even at this day, a topic of mortification and ridicule. Will it not be practicable hearafter for one man to perform the whole?[63]

Godwin bans musical performance (as well as theatre)[64] as a habitual execution of the compositions of others comparing it later to the repetition of unoriginal ideas coming from reading and education through which we have to, for the time being, carve out a space for individuality through co-operation with others which, painful as it is, is something which we have to suffer on the road of improvement in which all co-operation will eventually disappear. Conversation seems to be the most agreeable of the species of co-operation though one may have doubts whether it is not some kind of nonverbal communication that is at stake in Godwin's rhetoric. In conversation one or the other party is always yielding "to have his ideas guided by the other" and in this sense it is not fully independent from error. "Yet conversation," Godwin goes on, "and the intercourse of mind with mind, seem to be the most fertile sources of improvement."[65] The mental intercourse seems to be hinted at as an even better species of conversation where communication and co-operation are elevated to the level of a spiritual flow of sorts as the most perfect medium "between individuality and concert," as he phrases it. Since the "concert" as a species of "co-operation" is the necessary hindrance to the solo choir of the individual, it also must be coped with on the level of the economic co-operation of people. Here Godwin enters the sphere of science fiction and begins to dream

---

[62] Ibid., p. 758.
[63] Ibid., p. 760.
[64] Cf. ibid., p. 760.
[65] Ibid., pp. 760–761.

the dream of the eventual disappearance of manual labour which necessitates human cooperation in order to biologically survive, but which can be done without in the future. He does not quite mention robots, but he hints at them by means of a rhetorical question:

> At present, to pull down a tree, to cut a canal, to navigate a vessel, require the labour of many. Will they always require the labour of many? When we recollect the complicated machines of human contrivance, various sorts of mills, of weaving engines, steam engines, are we not astonished at the compendium of labour they produce? Who shall say where this species of improvement must stop?[66]

The industrial revolution, which Blake abhorred as enslaving, is the proof of human development toward individual independence for Godwin, toward the freedom from the necessity of co-operation and thus freedom from manual work. If this is achieved, society will become the pleasurable sphere of aesthetic experiences only supplemented by the liberated mind: "We ought to be able to do without one another. He is the most perfect man to whom society is not a necessary of life, but a luxury, innocent and enviable, in which he joyfully indulges."[67] Once we have become individuals, we can occasionally go down to the society for pleasure simultaneously "finding the highest complacence and the purest delight" in solitude.[68] Gradually, progressively, towards the end of Godwin's *Enquiry* (in the Appendix) we discover that the sphere of human perfection, the sphere of purest delight is the sphere of solitude away from the world, the sphere of godlike sublimation from which, like from the Olympian heights, we occasionally pay visits to the world.

This divine sphere is a transposition of the idea of our mastery over matter. Godwin, quite independently, quotes twice the statement by "the celebrated Franklin" (which, he admits in the footnote, he has "no authority to quote but the conversation of Doctor Price" and which he later calls Franklin's "sublime conjecture"), in which Franklin "conjectured that 'mind would one day become omnipotent over matter.'"[69]

It is through this conjecture that Godwin quite literally approaches the spheres of the sublime and attempts at elevating society to the level of the omnipotent power over the world achieved by the liberation of the mind both from the body and from the world:

> The conclusion of the progress which has here been sketched is something like a final close to the necessity of manual labour. It may be instructive in such cases to observe how the sublime geniuses of former times anticipated what seems likely

---

[66] Ibid., p. 759.
[67] Ibid., p. 761.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid., p. 759 and 770.

> to be the future improvement of mankind. It was one of the laws of Lycurgus that no Spartan should be employed in manual labour. For this purpose, under his system, it was necessary that they should be plentifully supplied with slaves devoted to drudgery. Matter, or, to speak more accurately, the certain and unintermitting laws of the universe, will be the Helots of the period we are contemplating. We shall end in this respect, oh immortal legislator! at the point from which you began.[70]

Godwin mixes Franklin's "sublime conjecture" with the conjectures "of the sublime geniuses of former times" (the Spartan system is referred to throughout *Enquiry*) to the effect that matter itself becomes dematerialized into universal laws accessible only to those, or, better, him, who has created them. The "immortal creator" is man liberated from the world, the master of the laws of the universe by means of which he can create, as a completely independent creature, whatever he pleases from the beginning. Godwin's future world is an allegory which sublimates slavery as practiced by the Spartans to an ideal social system in which there are no slaves and their owners because slaves are only the abstract rules in the hands of equally abstract thoughts. Slavery is thus rendered as a just system, provided that there are no slaves. Lycurgus was a "sublime genius" because his system, regardless of the actual Helots, was theoretically right, a step towards human developement and liberation from the manual labour which enslaves us.

This trope of enslavement is, of course, the trope which underlies any discourse which carries the torch of freedom and liberty. What promotes this discourse is, paradoxically, the trope of conquest preceded by the discovery of a New World. Since no such new world has been discovered on the earth, since the rhetorical paradise of the innocent America (e.g. Montaigne), for instance, has turned out to be a hell of extermination of the Other, the socio-political discourse had to move vertically, as it were, towards the spheres of another humanity within us, whose projection could only be conceived from another level, and on another level of perception. The crisis of monarchy did, to a certain extent, level the society, but it opened up the questions of the origin of law and authority, of the origin of order. The quest for human nature, the true one, becomes an attempt to fill in the gap between us and the spheres from which the order comes, or should come, without any mark of its being a human construct because such a mark is the nomination of the figure of the monarch and, the stamp of our slavery. Since we have become ourselves, and not the monarch's, we must look for the truth both within ourselves and outside, in the sphere previously occupied by the order of the monarchistic hierarchy and now open for exploration. Hence the possibility, and actually necessity of "going out of

[70] Ibid., p. 759.

oneself," of extending the universal humanity to the spheres where kings communicate with God who made them lawgivers.

The revival of the notion of the sublime in the eighteenth century is a discovery of something which has already existed, the discovery of a territory upon which the only Indians are, paradoxically, ourselves. The rhetoric of conquest (and we must remain within the realm of rhetoric, because, as we have seen, from Smith to Godwin whose very names are rhetorically loaded, society is a rhetorical projection of one system upon another, a metaphorical metamorphosis of man into a lubricated machine, or of a man giving himself for something else, which is the mechanism of metaphor) is always, inevitably, linked with that of conversion, of persuading someone to be something else and making him believe that this is what he has always desired to be, a Swedenborg's angel, for instance. Less metaphorically, the sublime is this sphere of discourse which provides space for the very idea of development, of change, for which there is no room in the system where everyone performs some predetermined function within the body of the king. The sublime gives us some space to, at least momentarily, look at ourselves from the outside, to see our own slavery to laws and rules. This space is also the space of the construction of the new systems away from the old ones, with the old ones still in sight.

Since the space of the sublime is infinite, since it approaches the divinity itself, the radicalism of a theory will depend on where the limit, the border of the new realm will be put. Needless to say that in the most radical cases, man, as in Godwin, wins or conquers God and elevates himself to the position of the eternal creator who really holds infinity in his hands and for whom the society functions only as a means of development towards the "unity of judgement" into which everyone 'plunges' only after having properly developed oneself. In this respect Godwin goes even farther than Swedenborg for whom everyone could see his evil inside at least after death, from the position of another world which only few can see in their lifetimes. Godwin's man-god is the task to be achieved within the human development to perfection where, one might expect, people will eventually become immortal. Godwin does promise that as well, though, in his peculiar rhetorical manner, only as a distant possibility. He writes about this possibility in the chapter devoted to *Health, and the Prolongation of Human Life*. Since mind must eventually rule over matter, and since, as is evident from traditional medicine, the vivacious activity of the human mind is productive of cheerfulness, this also proves that we already, to an extent, have some mental power of control over our bodies. Why not ask, then, if it is not "highly probable, in the process of human improvement, that we may finally obtain an empire over every articulation of our frame?"[71] If so, then why not suggest that human

[71] Ibid., p. 774.

development "may contribute to prolong our vigor, if not immortalize it, and, which is of more consequence, to make us live while we live."[72]

Not life after life but life during life. From the perspective of the sublime, of the sphere where everything becomes unlimited, the mundane, human life is in fact death, and the world a waste land of sorts, a country of the living dead. Immortality, and hence eternity, are a matter of mental conversion in which our particular mind must, by itself, renounce its own particularity and become universal. We must conquer the sublime so that the sublime eventually becomes ourselves. If we want to conquer it totally, we become eternal and divine forms sublime, as in Blake and Godwin, in the world whose less sublime parts still belong to it and struggle to improve, to sublimate themselves to the point of the eventual disappearance or dwelling on a planet where Jerusalem is in England. Swedenborg's conquest of the sublime denied the necessity of development and struggle for perfection making the renunciation of the devil an act of a singular discovery of evil within us which momentarily moved us away to the sphere of the angelic choirs. Rousseau (and Smith) were, of course, less radical as regards the transgression of the limits, and their projects were actually those of the domestication of certain areas of the sublime as our own, as beautiful — a project parallel to that of Hume's and Burke's on the social plane. The social contract, as a sort of agreement, clearly and legally delimits the spheres of the human as agreeable to one's nature, orchestrates the social functioning by means of the limited (by ourselves) spaces of freedom thus allowing man not to be quite confined to himself as dictated by the enslaving law of the *ancien regime*, but creating himself in the process of mimetic comparison with others from the outside, from the sphere of limited externality whose limits are the limits of freedom agreeable to everyone, the sphere of the negative virtue of not doing harm to others, of not "disharmonizing" the smooth work of society. Rousseau called this virtue sublime for the reason that for him this was the highest degree man could go and still remain a man. Beyond this limited sublime of Rousseau's there is, as we have seen, only the nothingness of madness and an unnameable sphere which even the word "sublime," as human word, cannot encompass.

---

[72] Ibid., p. 775.

VII

The Spirit of Feeling (On Mackenzie's London with a Digression on Dr. Johnson's Scotland)

> There are certain combined looks of simple subtlety — where whim, and sense, and seriousness, and nonsense, are so blended, that all the language of Babel set loose together could not express them — they are communicated so instantaneously, that you can scarce say which party is the infecter. I leave it to your men of words to swell pages about it.
>
> Lawrence Sterne

The "vile rust" which obstructs the smooth elegance and movement of society in Smith's vision of it in the beginning of chapter can be the previous done away with by less radical means than travels to nonexistent worlds of natural nature, to the worlds of angels or realms where heaven and hell agreeably cohabit a Jerusalem of London. Such mental travels are but "science fiction" versions of philosophical speculations which, as I have noted earlier, are frequently seen as a malady of sorts resulting from the sedentary life of the *literati* for whom some more real kind of "outing" is suggested as a cure. One can walk out to one's garden, for instance, or, like Hume, return back to the society of friends and compose onself seeing that everything is in fact agreeable.

For Henry Mackenzie, Hume's departure to France from Scotland "about the period of his first publications" is, as he declares in *The Mirror*, a circumstance which occasions the fictions of his *The Man of Feeling* (1771),

a departure which, according to John Mullan, can be read as an allegory "of the philosopher's retreat — the finally unhealthy seclusion of the intellectual self from the redeeming influences of the society."[1] Mackenzie's story is an attempt to bring Hume back from France, the country of *les philosophes*, to the Edinburgh of Smith and Mackenzie, but without his scepticism, as an inimitably simple Harley whose sceptical doubts have been left on the other side of the English Channel. Hume went too far from feeling "to the world" out there which, as unfamiliar, is actually hostile to the purity of the virtuous, local coexistence and thus also productive of the rust of selfishness, pride and desire — an image Mackenzie displays in his 'counter-story' — *The Man of the World* — published two years after *The Man of Feeling*, in 1773.

The theme of rust opens Chapter 11 of Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*, the opening chapter of the manuscript which a curate always took with him 'a-shooting' because it made excellent wadding and thus torn could not make a complete story:

> There is some rust about every man at the beginning; though in some nations (among the French, for instance) the ideas of the inhabitants from climate, or what other case you will, are so vivacious, so eternally on the wing, that they must, even in small societies, have a frequent collision; the rust therefore will off sooner; but in Britain, it often goes with a man to his grave; nay, he dares not even pen a *hic jacet* to speak out for him after his death.[2]

Rust is thus both welcome and unwelcome, naturally given us from the beginning, and still possible to be somehow gotten rid of, rubbed off through vivacious movements. The French do 'derust' themselves, but they do it excessively in the collisions of their ideas, which brings them to the point of being 'so eternally on the wing' that the rust will disappear altogether thus allowing for only too smooth a movement of unrestrained ideas productive of extreme scepticism. This approach of infinity is obviously unwelcome to the rusty British though the Scottish see this rust equally excessive as the French mobility, see it as covering the British to the point where the real metal which they are made of becomes unidentifiable. A method of getting rid of some of the rust suggested in the story is travel.

Travel, as I have already mentioned, was also suggested as a medical therapy for 'the English malady' of the literati who led a sedentary kind of life. The rust which 'is about' every man in Mackenzie is thus also a metaphor of a degree of some natural madness which we have to reasonably get rid of. In Mackenzie it is actually not "we," but "they": "'Let them rub it off by travel,' said the baronet's brother, who was a striking instance of

---

[1] J. Mullan, *Sentiment...*, p. 115.

[2] H. Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling* (London 1967), p. 7.

excellent metal, shamefully rusted."[3] Himself rusted, Mr. Silton, the baronet's brother (with whom the anonymous author of the torn manuscript disputes on rust) excludes himself from the process of 'derusting' and despite his being rusty, the excellence of the metal he is made of is somehow discernible. Unlike in the case of the British ("them") the excellence of the metal reverberates, as we learn, in Mr. Silton's remarks, in his words, a trace of the shameful rust being reflected only by his body:

> His person was tall and well-made; but the indolence of his nature had now inclined it to corpulency. His remarks were few [...] but they were such as the world might have heard with veneration; and his heart, uncorrupted by its ways, was ever warm in the cause of virtue and his friends.[4]

Mr. Silton is both rusty and venerable. His immobility, or indolence, made him corpulent, but it simultaneously protected him from the corruption of the outer world, of the disagreeable world with no friendly society around. Hence the paradox: a sedentary life is productive of rust, but the travel he suggests as a means of wearing off the rust, contact with the ways of the world can corrupt one's inner nature, one's 'metal,' its purity and virtue. The further discussion of the questions of rust and travel reveals even more dangers:

> 'They should wear it off by travel.' '— Why, it is true,' said I, 'that will go far; but then it will often happen, that in the velocity of a modern tour, and amidst the materials through which it is commonly made, the friction is so violent, that not only the rust, but the metal too is lost in the progress.'[5]

The dangers of the 'modern tour' are thus like the dangers of the French vivacity; the latter lead to total scepticism which in turn leads to the denial of the 'metal,' of the body of unquestionable values and identities, of the virtue speaking from the heart of Mr. Silton, for instance, and thus produce a nothingness of sorts, erase the core of the friendly, social coexistence. Since the rust is unwelcome, the dangers connected with getting rid of it can be avoided only either by accepting it as a cover or contamination of the internal purity of an otherwise excellent metal (which is the case of Mr. Silton), or to aestheticize the rust, make it beautiful and thus slim Mr. Silton's body so as it can speak of its internal beauty by itself. This latter option is offered by Mr. Silton himself who punningly translates his **rust** into encrustation in his explanation of the metaphor of tour:

---

[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., p. 8.
[5] Ibid.

> 'Give me leave to correct the expression of your metaphor,' said Mr. Silton: 'that is not always rust which is acquired by the inactivity of the body on which it preys; such, perhaps is the case with me, though indeed I was never cleared from my youth; but (taking it in its first stage) it is rather an encrustation, which nature has given for purposes of the greatest wisdom.'[6]

The goodness of human nature is thus an innate 'encrustation' which, in some cases, might turn into rust, might get covered by it to such an extent, that its beautiful pattern is no longer visible, and in extreme cases the corrosion devours even the metal upon which it has been 'encrusted.' Mr. Silton's pattern is still expressible, discernible through his words. Though he accepts his already corroded encrustation, he is still capable of recovering it which is possible, paradoxically, due to his sedentary way of life, due to his never having been exposed to the ways of the world, to travel which he himself suggests as a cure.

An ideal kind of travel is thus one in which one does not really engage, in which one does not allow for the corrupt world to corrode one's originary virtue inscribed, or encrusted, within one's nature. Those who undertake it, however, must be endowed with an incorruptible kind of nature. Otherwise, they should, like Mr. Silton, stay at home, in Scotland, for instance. In his theory of rust, Mr. Silton quite clearly distinguishes between two kinds of "bashfulness," the term which seems to be a synonym of virtue and purity of heart for him:

> 'there are two distinct sorts of what we call bashfulness; this, the awkwardness of a booby, which a few steps into the world will convert into the pertness of a coxcomb; that, a consciousness, which the most delicate feelings produce, and the most extensive knowledge cannot always remove.'[7]

The first kind of bashfulness confines one endowed with it to living away from the world, unless, of course, he desires to become a booby. Mr. Silton's bashfulness is probably of this first kind, the latter being reserved for Harley, the exemplary man of feeling, for whose introduction to the reader the discussion of "rustiness" prepares the ground. This unremovable sentiment of Harley's, though produced by the most delicate feelings, must thus be very strong in the face of the world which, throughout the novel, is presented as an opposite of virtue, bashfulness, purity of feeling. What constitutes this strength is, as it seems, the simplicity of feeling as opposed to the complex, distorted, insincere and fake world of economic exchange, luxury, philosophical speculations and, generally evil. In a letter to Elizabeth Rose Mackenzie wrote about *The Man of Feeling* that it was "simple to Excess;

---

[6] Ibid., pp. 8–9.

[7] Ibid., p. 9.

for I would have it as different from the Entanglement of a Novel as can be."[8] Writing about the book rather than the man Mackenzie sees the novel as a genre representing the ways of the world simultaneously rendering his text as a presentation of some disentangled simplicity in which reading is but a process which obstructs, or complicates the immediacy of the sentiment, of the affect which actually exists outside the text and which, as John Mullan notices, "belongs to a place outside 'the world,' ending the book not with the lessons to be drawn from the story of Harley's demise but with a confirmation of the divide between the virtue of the sentimental hero and the purposes of that 'world.'"[9]

'That world' is symbolized in *The Man of Feeling* by London, by the city to which Harley takes a trip having been warned in advance by his aunt that the place was "so replete with temptations, that it needed the whole armour of her friendly cautions to repel their attacks."[10] Harley, as we have seen, was already armoured with the nature from which delicate feelings could not be removed. This nature also allowed him to listen to the sentiments and feelings of others without the mediation of words and thus his armour does not only protect him from the attacks of the vile world, but it also allows him to see better worlds beneath the surface. Having fallen in love with Miss Walton, a woman who talked quite a lot, Harley "was remarkably silent in her presence. He heard her sentiments with peculiar attention, sometimes with looks very expressive of approbation."[11] As it turns out later in the story, his listening to the sentiments of others turn out to be complete misreadings, yet he does not fall into any scepticism as to the goodness of human nature and displays his own feelings even after his death. If Richardson's Clarissa Harlowe renounced this world in order to display the purity of her heart, Harley goes to the world and instead of renouncing it, simply does not notice its evils. He sees the world as a "child in the drama of the world"[12] by making it more beautiful than it is, by actually constructing the world of feeling seeing it beneath human physiognomy, the discipline in whose study he believes he is skilful thus clearly displaying the purity of his heart to the reader in the simplest possible manner, by showing it rather than, as was the case with Mr. Silton, expressing it in some verbal fashion. The evils of the world constitute the narrative delivered to the reader by the text of Mackenzie's book which, simultaneously presenting Harley's purity, renounces itself in the way it renounces the world. This double renunciation makes

[8] H. Mackenzie, *Letters to Elizabeth Rose of Kilravick*, H. W Drescher, ed. (Munster 1967), p. 13. Quoted in J. Mullan, *Sentiment...*, p. 12.

[9] J. Mullan, *Sentiment...*, pp. 120—121.

[10] H. Mackenzie, *The Man of...*, p. 18.

[11] Ibid., p. 16.

[12] Ibid., p. 17.

it possible to present Harley not as a figure of misanthrope, but as one who actually loves the world though he does not actually see it. He renounces it by submerging in it in a journey to London whose task is, as it seems, to make others, the reader, pity the world for its lack of sensibility simultaneously presenting the world as, potentially, more beautiful and sensible than it is.

The display of the beauty of the world is achieved by an aesthetic theory of Harley's which the anonymous narrator of the story finds difficult to define, but which he anyway defines as "we" which he posits already away from the corrupt ways of the world:

> Harley's notions of [...] the beautiful, were not always to be defined, nor indeed such as the world would always assent to, though we could define them. A blush, a phrase of affability to an inferior, a tear at a moving tale, were to him, like the Cestus of Cytherea, unequalled in conferring beauty.[13]

Mackenzie sends Harley to London, to the world, in search of the beautiful which he knows is not there which he creates by putting the girdle of Aphrodite around it and making us see it with Harley's eyes, endowing us with another eye, with some other optics with which creatures like Harley are naturally endowed in the way they are endowed with ineradicable encrustation rather than with rust.

> The optics of some minds are in so unlucky a perspective, as to throw a certain shade on every picture that is presented to them; while those of others (of which number was Harley) like [those] of the ladies, have a wonderful effect in bettering their complexions.[14]

Seeing the world through blushes and tears Harley does not really partake of the 'unlucky perspective' of others, of the shade of Hume's scepticism falling across his vision of the world. The 'bettering' of the world, from such a perspective, is but an illusion, a miracle of enhancing beauty by wearing the girdle of Aphrodite. What is thus propagated is a certain blindness to the ugliness of the world, to things unwelcome and horrible, uncertain and shadowy which attracted Hume, for instance. In order to 'better' the world we must remain confined to our innate simplicity from which we cannot depart to London, for instance, because going there, to the world, we actually remain the same, in the same place to which we have always already returned. Harley, of course, does leave his home, his locality, but it is impossible for him to dwell anywhere else, to accept anything of the world to which he goes.

---

[13] Ibid., pp. 14—15.

[14] Ibid., p. 25.

This impossibility is rhetorically rendered as, in fact, a physiological inability to interiorize anything which is away from home. In the very beginning of his journey, just after he left his home,

> Harley reached the inn where he proposed breakfasting; but the fullness of his heart would not suffer him to eat a morsel. He walked out on the road, and gaining a little height, stood gazing on that quarter he had left. He looked for his wonted prospect, his fields, his woods, and his hills; they were lost in the distant clouds. He pencilled them on the clouds, and bade them farewell with a sigh![15]

The fullness of his heart, the richness of sentiment he has taken from home is the only 'food' he can accept. He physiologically feels the world as hardly edible and his full heart actually remains in his beloved hills and woods (perhaps Scottish) which he redraws despite their invisibility. This agreeable, proper ("his") mental landscape within is the landscape Mackenzie's story wants to display and which it cannot really display unless the reader is already endowed with a "feeling heart" and thus with the capability of bettering the world in the way Harley betters it. It is in this manner that the beauty of sentiment and feeling is raised, or sublimated, into another world which is simultaneously referred to as beautiful. This world, the world which Mackenzie calls "the world" functions exclusively as a framework which confines the true sentiment and contaminates it. The idea of travel to the world suggested by Mr. Silton is, in the case of Harley, a way of wearing off the frame of the world, of opening it up to the infinity of disinterested goodness dwelling in his heart. If, as John Mullan notices, "Misanthropy is the *alter ego* of feeling [...] one of the contrary states in antagonism to which true feeling is typically defined [and also] an alternative version of dissatisfaction which, somehow has to be executed,"[16] then in order to be still benevolent one has to (oxymoronically) disinterestedly engage in the ways of the world, go to it and stay away from it at the same time.

The step back from the terror of the sublime in order to beautify or better it suggested by Burke is quite clearly discernible here. Mackenzie's "the world" is a foreign, unwelcome, wild landscape which must be somehow bettered, brought back to its originary beauty dwelling in Harley's heart in the form of an encrustation sensitive to the rust of the world which dangerously surrounds and attacks some less rust-proof creatures. Since one cannot really bring the hills of the familiar landscape down to London, one can at least 'pencil' them and then bring them back from a journey there after having displayed them to the world in the hope that it will, at least partially, familiarize itself with them by the discovery that the sentimental landscapes of Harley's also

---

[15] Ibid., p. 19.

[16] J. Mullan, *Sentiment...*, p. 121.

reside within it. Harley's return from London and his death on familiar ground is the necessary return which saves his purity without contaminating him with any attachment with the world to which he goes (the necessity inscribed already in the beginning of the story as the second type of unconquerable bashfulness) thus rendering the ways of the world unattractive and unwelcome because in fact blind to the disinterested sentiments and virtues displayed by Harley, but also dwelling within that world which only refuses to see them. Simultaneously functioning as the outside of the beauty of true sentiment, as its frame, the horrifying ways of the world must remain where they are so as not to deprive the beauty of its borders, of the territory upon which it naturally 'encrusts' itself. The outside is naturally dangerous, and it must remain so in order that the simple minds, like Harley's, do not have to philosophize as to decide whether being human is a feeling or a principle, a sentiment or a law which, without the natural borders, would have to somehow restrict the growth of Harley's sensible heart. Harley fell in love with Miss Walton because (though he did not quite realise it, and it is the narrator who tells us about it) "her beneficience was unbounded [...] for her humanity was a feeling, not a principle; but minds like Harley's are not very apt to make this distinction, and generally give our virtue credit for all that benevolence which is instinctive in our nature."[17] Virtue and beauty are thus instinctive rather than learnt and they are equally instinctively given credit by Harley. It is for this reason that, unlike in Burke, the sublime is posited "in the world" by Mackenzie, in the centre of the English society from whose convoluted ways Harley instinctively steps back and returns home to die in the peace of the agreeable society of friends. Though Burke's examples of the sublime were mostly natural landscapes of great mountains and endless oceans, the mechanism of their correction into the harmony of the socially agreeable beauty is very much like that of Harley's 'bettering' of the world the difference being that the social is quite explicitly rendered as a matter of some principial taste whose principles Burke had problems formulating. Not being a philosopher, Harley instinctively ignores the formulation of any principles and actually withdraws from their formulation to the grave under a tree whose gestural language makes the grave an agreeable space for Harley even before his death:

> The last time we passed there, methought he looked wistfully on that tree: there was a branch of it, that bent towards us, waving in the wind; he waved his hand, as if he mimicked its motion. There was something predictive in his look![18]

---

[17] H. Mackenzie, *The Man of...*, p. 16.

[18] Ibid., p. 132.

If the death of Clarissa Harlowe in Richardson's story was represented as a marriage with another world and her cessation of the power to write made that world unavailable to any representation, Harley as it were converses with his future grave thus seemingly diminishing the social space of virtue, but still leaving it within the scope of human communication. The death of the man of feeling does not leave the feelings bodiless, but leaves the feelings in their utmost purity hovering over the grave thus giving them freedom to penetrate the hearts of others, to find new embodiments in other men of feeling who visit Harley's grave:

> I sometimes visit his grave; I sit in the hollow of the tree. It is worth a thousand homilies! every nobler feeling rises within me! every beat of my heart awakens a virtue! — but it will make you hate the world — No: there is such an air of gentleness around, that I can hate nothing; but as to the world — I pity the men of it.[19]

There is no trace of terror in Mackenzie's rendering of Harley's death and grave. The home of Harley's heart makes any approaches of the sublime actually unthinkable as it is exactly in the individual power of virtue that the capability of seeing things as always already domesticated resides. Rather than the object productive of terror and aversion, the world eventually becomes the object of pity, and the terrors and sufferings are the domain of the men of it, rather than the domain of the men of feeling. Even the spirit of death is a gentle spirit, a different version of the genius of the place which has become the agreeable genius of the grave, of the 'garden of pure feeling.'

Though the image of contemplation upon a grave is thematically close to the scenes explored by the Graveyard Poets in the earlier eighteenth century, it is exactly the lack of the Burkean terror motivating his idea of the sublime which changes the closing scene of *The Man of Feeling* into a pastoral scene of sorts. Sentimentalism in eighteenth-century writings (and I have chosen Mackenzie's story as and extreme example of this genre rather than Sterne a digression on whose digressions on sensibility and its inevitable absurdities would amount to a volume reminiscent of the text attempting to present us the opinions of Mr. Tristram Shandy) is frequently read as an articulation of what John Mullan calls "an 'optimistic' view of the sociable capacities of human beings."[20] This seeming optimism seems to be born from the idea of there being a possibility of representing, and thus offering as real, the world without any terrors or horrors, a smooth world with smooth roads of feeling linking individuals, without any frictions or disturbances, with, and to, each other within some space or territory away from the old tracts of the old

[19] Ibid., p. 133.

[20] J. Mullan, *Sentiment...*, p. 198.

and rusty world. Mackenzie's mirror of bettering the world is the mirror which desublimates to the point, at which paradoxically, the virtue and the purity of heart themselves become objects of worship in their infinite agreeability hovering over the grave of Harley thus producing an 'agreeably sublime' sphere of admiration of itself, a sphere which, for Burke, would be a tautology comparable to talking of the blackness of white, for instance. Beauty should be smoothed and polished in Burke, but it also should be agreeably small, confined by some rules or principles. If the only constraint imposed on the humanity of feeling is individuality, then it cannot be surprising that this pure individuality dissolves to infinity, transgresses even the borders of one's grave and in fact propagates, in much less pathetic style, Swedenborg's populations of angels who can only meet in heaven, or, as seems to be the case with Mackenzie, in Scotland naturally separated from the lowlands to which her heart will never go. If the sublime of the graveyard poetry, as Samuel Monk claims, "sought to turn men's thoughts from health to death, from the cheerful light of day to the horrors of the grave, and in so doing it developed into an instrument for awakening the strong emotion which the mid-century enjoyed,"[21] sentimentalism desublimates this enjoyment in order to awaken the spirit of the grave as equally cheerful and healthy as light of day or children within us, children disinterestedly basking within the graveyard of the world.

* * *

> It is night; I am forlorn on the hill of storms. The wind is heard in the mountain. The torrent pours down the rock. No hut receives me from the rain, forlorn on the hill of winds!
>
> James Macpherson

A few year after Mackenzie sent his Harley to London (1771), from which he soon returned unchanged, Dr. Johnson published his remarks on Scotland in *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775) which he toured with Boswell in 1773 (probably trying to wear off some of his rust and corpulence resulting from the sedentary kind of life led by lexicographers). Probably not being the anonymous narrator of *The Man of Feeling*, he could not visit Harley's grave under a tree, but if he had, he would have probably read Harley's return from London as a rare exception, an idea

[21] S. Monk, *The Sublime...*, p. 88.

which he expressed in a peculiar theory of mountains which he develops in his text:

> As mountains are long before they are conquered, they are likewise long before they are civilized. Men are softened by intercourse mutually profitable, and instructed by comparing their own notions with those of others. Thus Caesar found the maritime parts of Britain made less barbarous by their commerce with the Gauls. Into a barren and rough tract no stranger is brought either by the hope of gain or of pleasure. The inhabitants having neither commodities for sale, nor money for purchase, seldom visit more polished places, or if they do visit them, seldom return.[22]

In Dr. Johnson's eyes the polished places, and thus agreeable places and, as places, topographically defined objects, objects not too big to be beautiful have already been created. They are places where ideas and money circulate without any obstructions or frictions due to a certain softening of man which is the result of that 'intercourse.' He also quite explicitly identifies colonization with civilization. The Highlands are an object of his interest only as an object potentially becoming available to culture though only little hope for this end reverberates in his words. The British must have been seen as soft enough to be generously conquered by the Romans who probably saw equally little hope for the softening of the Scots and for this reason erected Hadrian's Wall thus clearly marking the end of civilization. The inhabitants within have nothing to offer to the civilization though, once allowed to cross the border, they are incapable of resisting its attractions as if they were naturally theirs, only forgotten through the separation.

If Mackenzie allegorizes Scotland as the land of the heart, Dr. Johnson lives "a life of allegory,"[23] a life of the allegory of London as a model for "The great community of the world" (*Rambler* 135), where "Mankind is one vast republick" (*Idler* 19) where one can evade solitude which to him was horror, as Sir Joshua Reynolds once wrote.[24] "An atmosphere of speech irresistibly delivered envelopes Johnson's London," says Max Byrd,

> its clubs and taverns and debates [...], and makes it to our imagination a city of ceaseless conversation. And this atmosphere Johnson [...] breathes hungrily. 'The town is my element,' he writes to Dr. Brockelsby towards the end of his life; 'there are my friends, there are my books... and there are my amusements.'[25]

---

[22] S. Johnson, *Selected Writings*, P. Cruttwell, ed. (Penguin Books 1986), p. 139.

[23] Cf. M. Byrd, *London Transformed; Images of the City in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1978), p. 117.

[24] Cf. ibid., p. 111.

[25] Ibid., p. 112.

A speechless community of sentiments is thus alien to Johnson, a community of solitude, as it were, in which there is no room for difference and argument. Solitude forces one to face the absence of others, a disengagement from the world. London, a place of endless traffic and exchange, a chaotic hubbub of fake words expressing fake feelings allegorizing Mackenzie's "the world" is for Johnson a place of disagreeable agreement in which there is nothing to fear, where man constructs himself in the exchange of words, ideas or goods thus never being simple left to himself facing the Other. During his trip to Scotland, Johnson sees nothing attractive in its desolate landscapes, he sees them as separated from the world, from the republic of men in which Harley saw nothing but himself and from whose polished places he returned, finding them rusty and disagreeable, to his hill pencilled on the departure, and to the solitude of his grave. Sitting among hills in Scotland, Johnson is forced to concentrate on himself because there is nothing to see:

> The day was calm, the air soft, and all was rudeness, silence, and solitude. Before me, and on either side, were high hills, which by hindering the eye from ranging, forced the mind to find entertainment for itself.[26]

This "uniformity of barrenness"[27] is actually nonexistent to the eye, it is everywhere, and everywhere the same, the sublime in one of its purest forms in Burke — huge and undifferentiated, an infinity of sorts. Despite Boswell's company, Johnson feels absolutely lonely, the only attractive object in this rude, desolate space being Johnson's mind which begins to entertain itself with the idea of solitude:

> [...] yet the imaginations excited by the view of an unknown and untravelled wilderness are not such as rise in the artificial solitude of parks and gardens, a flattering notion of self-sufficiency, a placid indulgence of voluntary delusions, a secure expansion of the fancy, or a cool concentration of the mental powers. The phantoms which haunt a desert are want, and misery, and danger; the evils of dereliction rush upon the thoughts; man is made unwillingly acquainted with his own weakness, and meditation shows him only how little he can sustain, and how little he can perform.[28]

Solitude in a park or a garden in London is thus a repose, an artificial one, in which man can securely ponder over himself or others, but from which one can always return (like Hume) to common talk or some less common conversation. In the Highlands one cannot resist the dangers of "dereliction,' of reduction to the point of nothingness in the ways of the infinite world.

---

[26] S. Johnson, *Selected...*, p. 316.

[27] Ibid., p. 315.

[28] Ibid., p. 316.

The dangers of infinity forcibly remind man of his 'littlenes' and they belittle him and his actions to the point (even to mathematical point) beyond the reach of the beautiful. In the sublime landscape, man sees himself as sublime, as inexpressible, as infinitely small. If Thomas Gray, after his visit to the Alps in 1739, wrote that seeing them "you have Death perpetually before your eyes, only so far removed, as to compose the mind without frightening it,"[29] Johnson sees in the mountain scenery a diminished man, an infinitely small man which he becomes in the absence of culture, in the absence of the polished places of a London, a man incapable of any action, paralysed by the fear of infinity so immediate that it makes man not only incapable of composing his mind, but of composing anything.[30]

---

[29] *Letters of Thomas Gray* (London 1820), p. 70.

[30] Dr. Johnson's well known denial of the existence of the original of Macpherson's Ossianic poems might have something in common with his doubt as to the possibility of anything 'cultural,' or beautiful, having been created in the 'deserts' of the Scottish Highlands. Though he admits that "Pleasure and terror are indeed the genuine sources of poetry," he simultaneously, in the same sentence, goes away from this original and says that "poetical pleasure must be such as human strength and fortitude may combat." Rooted in the sublime, the art of poetry must stay away from it as approaches of infinity, "the good and evil of Eternity are too ponderous for the wings of wit; the mind sinks under them in passive helplessness, content with calm belief and humble adoration" (*Selected...*, p. 423).

VIII

The Tourist
(On the Picturesque)

> We returned home beneath a sky the most awfully sublime that can be imagined. The deep gloom of clouds was rendered the more dismal by a mixture of sullen light. [...] Miss Sharpe for all her passion for the sublime, which is very strong, was so overpowered by the terrifying scenery, that she could not bear to look at it. I could not resist such a spectacle.
>
> A letter from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter to Miss Catherine Talbot

Miss Sharpe loved the sublime, but she could not look at it. Mrs. Carter could not resist the sublime 'spectacle' though she herself describes it as awful, gloomy and dismal. The sublime can be an object of admiration, for both the ladies, only as a 'spectacle,' the difference being that Miss Sharpe does not see anything spectacular in the gloom for which she has a passion, and which seems to be too gloomy for her.

The sublime is thus a paradoxical thing which is either absent to one's eye, or present as already representable. The spectacle of terror, the possibility of representing terror within a pleasurable form is inscribed within Burke's theory as the inevitable gesture of withdrawal in its face, of diminishing the impact of the approaching infinity. The irresistible passion for the sublime (like Mrs. Carter's, for instance) is actually the passion for resisting it, for facing it in order to frame it as a spectacular object, a remembrance of a journey to the spheres of which, like Dr. Johnson, we do not want to partake, and which actually prove the human power of resisting the irresistible, of grasping infinity in the form of a book, a poem, or a picture. Burke's

"spectacularization" of the sublime inscribes philosophising within any description or presentation of a terrible object as the necessity of its reproduction which also proves the reproducer's mastery over the sublime. The "rise" of Gothic fiction in the 1760s with its notorious visions of haunted castles, "of heroines preyed on by unspeakable terrors, of the blackly lowering villain, of ghosts, vampires, monsters and werewolves"[1] is simultaneously the rise of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick sees as "the conventional genre par excellence."[2] It is also the conventionalization of the sublime, the implicit inscription of rules and principles of producing the sublime which Burke had problems in discovering. David Punter notices that many

> of the details of Burke's analysis have relevance to the Gothic writers — in particular his emphasis on obscurity, vastness, magnificence as constitutive elements of the sublime — but his most important contribution was to confer on terror a major and worthwhile literary role.[3]

In other words, the authority of the philosopher, of philosophy, establishes terror as category to be reproduced in literature, in writing, simultaneously providing the 'reproducers' with a list of ready-made attributes of terror, with rules and principles (conventions) of representing the sublime; himself failing, as we have seen, to make a clear-cut distinction between the sublime and the beautiful.

Terror, however paradoxically it may sound, becomes a terrifying thing in the eighteenth century, and its massive reproduction, be it in the Gothic fictions or in the Graveyard poetry, serves the purpose of domesticating it within some secure field of writing, and, more generally, aesthetics. Since what is at stake is the internalization and naturalization of order and law as attributes of man, terror (which Hobbes saw as the necessary, external cohesive power of society simultaneously seeing law and order as contrary to our natural passions in *Leviathan*) also has to be domesticated and naturalized in order for citizens to act properly by themselves rather than from fear of some punishment inflicted by a power external to their tastes and actually dictating those tastes to people. As David Jarrett notices, the rise of Gothic fiction is an aesthetic extension of the political fears of English society:

---

[1] D. Punter, *The Literature of Terror. A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* (London and New York: Longman 1980), p. 1.

[2] S. E. Kosofsky, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (New York and London: Methuen 1986), p. 166.

[3] D. Punter, *Literature of...*, p. 45.

> Otranto, perhaps, is as much England as it is Strawberry Hills and is built on a fear of a return to something like feudal absolutism [...]. To many the threat of a return to an absolutism that was virtually feudal seemed as real towards the end of the century as it had up to the '45 rebellion, for the sometimes insane George III was cast in the role of a potential Gothic tyrant as the Catholic pretender had been.[4]

The Gothic fiction reproduces the terror and barbarity (the word "Gothic" was almost synonymous with "barbarous" still in the first half of the eighteenth century[5]) of the past as a warning against the external terror of the absolutist monarchy simultaneously normalizing the terror itself normalized by "one of the bloodiest criminal laws in Europe created in England over the century" in order to deal with the terror of everyday life where "there were more *banditti*, in the shape of highwaymen and smugglers, on the roads and shores of England than in the pages of Ann Radcliffe's romances."[6] A theorization of terror, like Burke's, posits the 'terrible terror' in the past as something already done away with simultaneously positing the 'delightful terror' of the sublime as actually expressible, spectacular, be it in the form of a gothic ruin, or that of a public execution. "Terror," David Jarrett notices, "was not only the basis of Edmund Burke's aesthetic of the Sublime and the principal engine of much Gothic fiction, it was also the basis of English criminal law [...]."[7] Strength and power are also attributes of the Burkean sublime, but they are productive of fear and terror provided they are 'wild,' tigers in howling forests rather than some Blakean "horses of instruction" we see continually among us, however strong creatures they may be.[8] We are thus affected only by strength "which is *natural* power," and with which Burke, interestingly, also endows kings and institutions:

> The power which arises from institution in kings and commanders, has the same connection with terror.[9]

This naturalization of power is simultaneously its sublimation, which, paradoxically, makes it, say, politically useless as regards social order because, as he himself claims, useful strength employed for our benefit is never sublime.[10] Power is thus posited as an object of awe and admiration outside

---

[4] D. Jarrett, *The Gothic Form in Fiction and its Relation to History* (Winchester: King Alfred's College 1980), pp. 10—11.

[5] Cf. A. E. Longueil, "The Word 'Gothic' in Eighteenth-Century Criticism," *Modern Language Notes*, xxxviii (1923), pp. 453—460.

[6] Ibid., p. 11.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Cf. E. Burke, *A Philosophical...*, p. 113.

[9] Ibid., p. 116.

[10] Ibid., p. 114.

the society and its pleasures. What Burke's philosophical inquiry makes thus impossible to achieve is complete aesthetization of the sublime which is only theoretically posited as the opposite of the beautiful, as a threat to the beautiful simultaneously negatively constitutive of it. What we are capable of perceiving and mastering are only what phenomenologists could call "concretizations" or "actualizations" of the sublime, forms of the sublime which, as forms, are always somehow mixed with the beautiful. The terror of the sublime is the beautiful's constitutive outside and, as such, inevitably contaminates the beautiful itself never becoming fully domesticated, subjected to its orderly sphere. Things are thus neither purely sublime, nor purely beautiful, and it is within this undecidable sphere that at the end of the eighteenth century the category of the picturesque interferes in order to "give those objects which are neither beautiful nor sublime (in Burke's sense of the words) a local habitation and a name," as Samuel Monk claims.[11]

There is, I think, a little more to it. Since the sublime and the beautiful themselves have no local habitation, since they are names of philosophical categories only deducible from the sublime somehow "mixed" with the beautiful, the category of the picturesque (propagated mainly by William Gilpin) is necessary to legitimize "spectacularization" (in the sense of framing and displaying) as a natural gesture of reducing the terror of the sublime without simultaneously being enslaved by the dictatorship of the rules of the beautiful. Burke as it were opens up a huge territory which now has to be explored by topographers who will name its habitable places and also mark the inhabitable ones thus clearly marking the limits of the aesthetic. It cannot be surprising though, that such an operation could only be done at the cost of both the sublime and the beautiful as independent, ideally opposite, terms.

The metaphor of the topographer quite accurately describes, I think, Gilpin's endeavor, as the picturesque mind he propagates has to constantly carry a pencil and a drawing pad about in order to redraw the borders of the beautiful actually sublimating it a little in order to, paradoxically, desublimate it. Gilpin achieves this paradoxical effect by naturalizing the beautiful, by inscribing the rules which govern and order the beautiful (in the Burkean sense, of course) into nature. There are things which are beautiful in nature, but there are also "such as are *picturesque* [...] those which please the eye in their *natural state*; and those, which please from some quality, capable of being *illustrated in painting*."[12] Certain natural objects are thus naturally marked for human art, naturally different from nature which

---

[11] S. Monk, *The Sublime...*, p. 2.

[12] W. Gilpin, *Three Essays. On Picturesque Beauty; On Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape: To which is added a poem on Landscape Painting* (London 1792), p. 3.

itself is beautiful and pleasing anyway, but which simultaneously lacks something which only a picturesque eye can see. The idea of the genius of the place is, of course, discernible here, the difference being that Gilpin's picturesque genius in a way demolishes the agreeable spaces of landscape gardens as too smooth:

> Turn the lawn into a piece of broken ground: plant rugged oaks instead of flowering shrubs [...] give in the rudeness of a road: mark it with wheel-tracks; and scatter around a few stones; in a word, instead of making the whole *smooth*, make it *rough*, and you make it also *picturesque*. All the other ingredients of beauty it already possessed.[13]

Whether the past tense used in the last sentence means that the garden thus rearranged still possessed anything of its previous, "non-picturesque" beauty is Gilpin's secret. Interestingly, a similar kind of demolition takes place in the sight of a Palladian villa. In order to make *Palladian* architecture *picturesque*, we have to "from a *smooth* building [...] turn it into a rough ruin," Gilpin instructs us.[14]

The chief enemy of Gilpin's in his search for the picturesque seems to be any trace of "smoothness" which, for Burke, was "a quality essential to beauty" as regards small objects, and which was actually productive of variety:

> Observe that part of a beautiful woman where she is perhaps the most beautiful, about the neck and breasts; the smoothness, the softness, the easy and insensible swell, the variety of the surface, which is never for the smallest space the same [...][15]

Gilpin explicitly refers to Burke as regards his idea of smoothness,[16] and without criticizing him directly, finds the smooth part of Burke's contemplation uninteresting for the picturesque eye because not rough enough, and, as it seems, he would rather paint something on that part:

> The smoothness of the surface is only the ground of the colours. In itself we admire it no more, than we do the smoothness of the canvas, which receives the colours of the picture.[17]

What is "naturally" beautiful is thus only a background for Gilpin, an object too regular in its smoothness as to become nice in a picture. Natural beauty, as opposed to its picturesque version, is too close to sublimity which

---

[13] Ibid., p. 8.
[14] Ibid., pp. 7—8.
[15] E. Burke, *A Philosophical...*, p. 216.
[16] Cf. W. Gilpin, *Three Essays...*, p. 5.
[17] Ibid., p. 23.

is also a version of an infinite smoothness for Gilpin. Finding the distinction between the sublime and the beautiful "rather inaccurate," he says that

> *Sublimity* alone cannot make an object *picturesque.* However grand the mountain, or the rock may be, it has no claim to this epithet, unless it's form, it's colour, or its accompaniaments have *some degree of beauty.* Nothing can be more sublime than the ocean: but wholly unaccompanied, it has little of the picturesque. When we talk therefore of the sublime object, we always understand that it is also beautiful.[18]

It is not quite clear whether Gilpin does not deny "the existence of a sublimity other than picturesque sublimity" and simply ignores it, as Samuel Monk claims.[19] By making sublimity a degree of beauty, he makes use of Burke's distinction by incorporating it within his own theory as its canvas. The sublime alone cannot be picturesque, but neither can be the beautiful, and it is human assistance, or art, which brings either the sublime or the beautiful to the fore, to the foreground. Everything, even the sublimest of oceans, is not infinitely smooth and formless, and it contains a little of the picturesque. It is this inscription of finitude in all objects which is responsible for Gilpin's denial of the sublime as a philosophical category to which a picturesque eye is blind to as its very presence, the act of seeing, is already an act making the sublime spectacular, and thus potentially picturesque.

Though usually read as guidebooks for proper painting and drawing, Gilpin's frequent digressions on philosophy and morality make a simple classification of the category of the picturesque as a strictly "artistic" category questionable. At one point in his *Three Essays* (1792) he claims that the picturesque eye actually "abhors art, and delights solely in nature."[20] In the manner the unaccompanied sublime was too smooth to be picturesque, art is simply too regular to partake of it, it "abounds with *regularity*, which is only another name of *smoothness.*"[21]

Art is thus equally unwelcome as the sublime, and what is thus propagated is an idea of another nature, of a nature which is always already pleasing to the eye, of nature which is neither too natural nor too artificial. Gilpin calls this nature, quite ambiguously, "a painter's nature" which is "whatever he imitates; whatever the object be what is commonly called natural, or artificial. Is there a greater ornament of landscape, than the ruins of a castle?"[22] "A painter's nature" is thus, generally, imitability, an imitability inscribed

---

[18] Ibid., p. 43.

[19] S. Monk, *The Sublime...*, p. 224.

[20] W. Gilpin, *Three...*, p. 26.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., p. 27.

within the landscape as already agreeable with "a painter's nature." Since nature is already naturally ornamented with ruins rather than, as we have seen, with Palladian villas whose smooth shapes are probably unimitable for Gilpin (at least for those not endowed with painters' natures), the roughness of such a "sight" is natural rather than conventional as it is the regular conventionality of art which the picturesque eye abhors.

The idea of the picturesque seems thus to be a programmatic unregulation of the already regulated, a "bold stroke" which Gilpin suggests as a method of drawing in which "a part is given for a whole, which it cannot fail at suggesting."[23] Suggestive rather than representative, the picturesque imitates by way of synecdoche, that is to say, by presenting objects without presenting them as closed and regulated totalities whose parts infallibly bring the totalities to one's mind. Since no part can properly represent the sublime which, in its ideality, lacks parts, its existence as an object or a philosophical category cannot be suggested by any bold strokes. No finished object of art can be an object of such a "suggestion," exactly because of its subjection to the rules of art. Hence Gilpin's love for "the ruined tower, the Gothic arch, the remains of castles and abbeys."[24] Such objects, in their incompleteness, can be suggestive not only of their former completeness, but also of the completeness of the work nature itself, something inconceivable if the sublime is regarded as a natural category. Ruins are, says Gilpin, "consecrated by time; and almost deserve the veneration we pay to the work of nature itself."[25] The roughness of a ruin is a natural bold stroke upon the landscape which, in case of an absence of such a ruin, can be "planted" upon it by the stroke of the picturesque traveller as a reminder and part of the work of nature itself. Bold strokes, as opposed to the free ones in which there is "no appearance of constraint," actually enrich nature by making it rough, by "desmoothing" it which is tantamount, as it seems, to creating incomplete parts within it, so as to make the work of synecdoche possible.

> Thus by inriching the parts of a united *whole* with *roughness*, you obtain the combined idea of *simplicity* and variety; from whence results the picturesque.[26]

The diversification of parts is actually their creation upon the otherwise united, whole, simple (generally smooth) surface of things which thus boldly drafted leads us back to simplicity and totality via the "inriched" parts. Otherwise the smoothness or simplicity of the world cannot be made present and such an attempt is actually contrary to the common sense for which

---

[23] Ibid., p. 17.
[24] Ibid., p. 46.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., p. 28.

infinity, eternity and generally "first principles" cannot be made accessible. Blake's infinity which he wanted to hold in the palm of his hand in its simultaneity becomes a mere rhetorical suggestion in the hands of Gilpin, a rough object, like a grain of sand, which can tell one only that there is a part of a greater whole, perhaps simple and smooth, but whose simplicity and smoothness are not commensurable with the common sense which tells us that we can see only what we can see. Gilpin's message is the message of the return of common sense both to art and to philosophy as the only means of "picturing" the world without falling into the trap of the infinity of the sublime and equally terrifying subjection to the rules of art. "If we made," he suggests.

> common sense the criterion in matters of art, as well as science, we should be nearer the truth. [...] Thus, in our inquiries into *first principles*, we go on, without end, and without satisfaction. The human understanding is unequal to search. In philosophy we inquire for them in vain — in physics — in metaphysics — in morals. [...] All is uncertainty; a strife of words; the old contest [...][27]

The category of the picturesque is thus in fact a commonsensical category. The idea of picturesque travel in search of the picturesque whose guidelines Gilpin drafts in a quite straightforward manner without too excessive use of any rhetorical "bold strokes" becomes, rhetorically, the idea of a travel through life with common sense as a guide. With this kind of guide in hand one does not really ignore the sublime as one simply avoids it, never comes face to face with it. The picturesque, its search, is posited as a way of living according to taste whose goodness consists in its being socially shared. To Reynolds' delicately critical suggestion that "perhaps picturesque is somewhat synonymous with taste,"[28] Gilpin replies that he "suspects" that the picturesque and taste are words applicable to "excellences of an inferior order; and which are incompatible with the grand stile."[29] This inferiority does not seem to be really inferior, as the grand stile is the kind of art which, as we have seen, the picturesque eye abhors, something actually alien to common sense and common taste. The picturesque nature is not grand, but natural, that is to say, neither sublime nor confined by the stylistic demands of art. Since its nature is basically synecdochic, it is not a picture or a painting, but, let us repeat, something "capable of being *illustrated in painting*," a part of an as yet nonexistent picture which we commonsensically desire to complete leaving the picturesque objects always

---

[27] Ibid., p. 31 and p. 33.

[28] Ibid., p. 35.

[29] Ibid., p. 42.

incomplete, drawn by means of the bold stroke in our drawing pad in order to supplement our memory.

In his essay on the picturesque travel, Gilpin quite explicitly suggests that we should make bold strokes of the picturesque objects supplying them with written commentaries in order to fix "the lead idea" because "memory must be distrusted."[30] Fixing the leading ideas we do not depict what we see, but what we should see, the improved fragments of what Gilpin terms "defective nature"[31] to be completed in the form of a book of travels as a supplement of one's memory and as a guide addressed to other followers of Gilpin's picturesque who at that time "were a legion," as Samuel Monk puts it.[32] We can see more by travelling, but we must constantly remember that what appears before our eyes is a variety of new parts which do enrich our picture of the world, but which we have to constantly supplement by ourselves leaving the completion suspended. Travel books are thus guide books which guide us not to where their authors were and what they saw, but which guide us to travel, teach us to travel and see the world with the picturesque eye, which is also the commonsensical eye of taste. Thus travelling we remove the already mentioned "defective nature," its too smooth and sublime background, and remain suspended between the sublime and the artful. Rather than ignoring the sublime, Gilpin replaces it with this suspension, with the "agreeable suspense" in which the mind of the traveller is constantly kept.[33]

According to Monk, this suspension of the sublime (which he reads as an act of ignoring) in Gilpin is a mark of an "advance in sophistication on his part and that of his followers," as well as "temporary loss of interest in the immediate, emotional relationship between man and nature" awaiting to be revived by "the boy Wordsworth, in the fastness of Cumberland."[34] While the "boy Romanticism" will travel to infinity, preferably vertically, the short lived career of the idea of horizontal travel in search of the picturesque seems to be an attempt at eventual mastering of nature, human nature included, so as to make it both natural and aesthetic, to an extent unlimited, but simultaneously available as a whole through the variety of its parts in the form of a travel book, for instance, a history of the scenes from one's life. The paradox of this kind of life, however, is that it must be led away from home. The picturesque mind is a wandering mind, yet it never wonders as to what is picturesque or what is not. Hence the lack of the immediacy

[30] Cf. ibid., p. 65.
[31] Ibid., p. 67.
[32] S. Monk, *The Sublime...*, p. 224.
[33] Cf. W. Gilpin, *Three Essays...*, p. 48.
[34] S. Monk, *The Sublime...*, p. 224.

between man and nature Monk writes about. Thus domesticating or familiarizing the space, the picturesque mind feels at home away from home. It is only here, with home rendered as journey, that the universal metaphor of life as journey becomes thinkable.

The paradox of home, however, is, as Ralph Flores notices, that it "is needed and can be imagined only when dispossessed or left behind."[35] It is exactly this paradox, and inevitable one, which Gilpin's theory attempts at escaping. Living in search of the picturesque is itself an escape from the home of, too strict, rules of art toward something already imprinted upon the mind of the traveller in the form of picturesque nature. The fact that such a travel is productive of Dulicineas of sorts does not go unnoticed, and in 1812 William Combe sends a quixotic figure of Dr. Syntax to search for the picturesque in the world there.

The motives of Syntax's tour are not quite disinterested, and he leaves home in search of the picturesque for a number of reasons. One of them is Syntax's wife:

> Nay, to avenge the slightest wrong,
> She could employ both arms and tongue,
> And, if we list to country tales,
> She sometimes would enforce her nails.
> Her face was red, her form was fat,
> A round-about, and rather squat; [...]
> 'Twas not the custom of this spouse
> To suffer long a quiet house:
> She was among those busy wives
> Who hurry-scurry through their lives;
> And make amends for fading beauty
> By telling husbands of their duty.[36]

The oppressive presence of Mrs. Syntax's voice and nails in order to keep her husband to his duty supplemented with the monotony of his daily life and work at school which brings very little income bring to Syntax's mind, like a flash ("A sudden thought across him came") the idea of going for a tour. The idea comes to him in a brief moment when his wife is away and the house is quiet, his "rumination" being interrupted by the return of his wife who becomes furious at the sight of her husband pacing the room around in excitement awakened by the idea of travel, rather than quietly sitting, as should be, in his chair:

---

[35] R. Flores, *The Rhetoric of Doubtful Authority. Deconstructive Readings of Self-Questioning Narratives, St. Augustine to Faulkner* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 1984), p. 28.

[36] W. Combe, *The Tour of Doctor Syntax in Search of the Picturesque. A Poem* (London: Methuen 1903), p. 3.

'Twas at this moment, when inspir'd,
And by his new ambition fir'd, [...]
That Mrs. Syntax re-appear'd:
Amaz'd she look'd, and loud she shriek'd,
Or, rather like a pig she squeak'd,
To see her humble husband dare
Thus quit his sober ev'ning chair,
And pace, with varying steps, about,
Now in the room, and now without.[37]

Away from his chair, Syntax is already away from his home, on the threshold of the room, both outside and inside. This time, exceptionally, he manages to keep his wife silent and listen to his arguments. Unlike Bunyan's Christian in search of eternity, of "Life, life, eternal life," Syntax does not run away from home putting fingers in his ears in order not to hear his wife and children crying after him to return,[38] but silences his wife with a promise of return to a different home, well supplied and rich due to the income from the book he is going to write:

At Doctor *Pompous* give a look;
He made his fortune by a book;
And if my volume does not beat it,
When I return, I'll fry and eat it.[39]

The book is going to be, of course, about his picturesque tour which he is going to write in a manner worth quoting here extensively:

"I'll make a TOUR — and then I'll WRITE IT
You well know what my pen can do,
And I'll employ my pencil too: —
I'll ride and *write*, and *sketch* and *print*,
And thus create a real mint;
I'll *prose* it here, I'll *verse* it there,
And picturesque it ev'ry where:
I'll do what all have done before;
I think I shall — and something more.[40]

The "something more" is, of course, outdoing "what all have done before." Since the above is a concise version of Gilpin's principles of the picturesque, writing one's tour according to these principles one enriches one's life simultaneously becoming rich and thus actually changing it in order to,

[37] Ibid., p. 4.
[38] Cf. J. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Penguin Books 1987), p. 53.
[39] W. Combe, *The Tour...*, p. 5.
[40] Ibid., pp. 4—5.

paradoxically, become a person *like everybody else*. Syntax posits *himself* as a figure different from everybody else, because he, unlike the "all' who have written their tours, still leads a sedentary kind of life attached to his chair by the absolute rule of his wife's art of talking. It is the very idea of the tour which makes him already mobile and vivid, though still within the limits of his home.

In the idea of the picturesque there seems to be no escape from home. Neither was such an escape possible in the case of Mackenzie's man of feeling who actually went to the world without leaving home, with the familiar landscape "penciled" in his mind as an armour against the world's impurities which might contaminate his pure mind. The picturesque mind, or eye, familiarizes the world, improves the imperfections of nature out there, simultaneously promising the improvement of the already familiar. In the case of Bunyan's Christian, the question of return is actually unthinkable, as eternity, the sublimest of tasks, actually does not belong to this world, and does not promise any finality in the form of a book, for instance. Christian, unlike Harley, never turns back, and goes through the world somewhere else. If Harley's progress means an inevitable return to the same, Christian's progress is a progress to infinity through the vanity fair of which he does not want to partake and which he does not actually want to change. A departure for a picturesque tour promises a change of this life, making it look nice in a picture, and if the picturesque traveller looks back home, he looks at it without any nostalgia because a bettering of it is already inscribed within the very idea of such travel. Harley's nostalgia at the departure becomes, in the case of Syntax, anger and disgust with what he leaves behind him. Having spent his life in the underpaid service of "Mother Church," he departs from the village saying good bye to it with anger:

> "[...] But now, on better things intent,
> On far more grateful labours bent,
> New prospects open to my view:
> So thankless Mother Church, adieu!"
> Thus, having said his angry say,
> Syntax proceeded on his way.[41]

Having left his home Syntax becomes a picturesque traveller now free to go wherever he wants. Though the first thing he does is get lost in the sublime wilderness of some "sad, unpeopled world," it is enough for him to see a guide post which "Had ev'ry letter'd mark deface'd" to inspire him to draw a picture.

---

[41] Ibid., p. 8.

But, as my time shall not be lost,
I'll make a drawing of the post;
And, tho' a flimsy taste may flout it,
Ther's something *picturesque* about it:
'Tis rude and rough, without a gloss,
And is well cover'd o'er with the moss;[42]

Guided by Gilpin's principles, Doctor Syntax's eye beautifies the world around and maps it, in the form of drawings, in the book. Doctor Syntax travels through the world actually erasing all its horrors and terrors. There are unpeopled, sublime landscapes around, but they are momentarily replaced, improved by Syntax's pen and pencil. He also goes through numerous unpleasant experiences in the poem, but these terminate in picturesque happy ends. Having been robbed by highwaymen and tied to a tree at night, for instance, Syntax is set free by two ladies approaching him on "two trotting palfreys," a vision which is compared to La Mancha's Knight's first seeing of his Dulcinea. The horrors of the night give way to the improved perspective, a picturesque sight, and to the possibility of further travel and search of the picturesque in order to write a travel, as he had promised his wife. In Syntax's book, unlike in the poem about Syntax's travel, there is no room for descriptions or drawings which are displeasing. The art of life is in fact the art of drawing which is accessible only to the traveller, but to such as is equipped with the guiding principles which render this travel safe.

Canto XII of the poem begins with a metaphor of life as journey, though not quite a safe one:

Life is a Journey, on we go [...]
Like a stream, whose varying course
Now rushes with impetuous force;
Now in successive eddies plays,
Or in meanders gently strays,
It still moves on, till spreading wide,
It mingles with the briny tide;
And, when it meets the ocean's roar,
The limpid waves are seen no more.[43]

The ocean's roar, an example of the sublime for Burke, is rendered as the end of the picturesque part of the stream which, first having become wide and smooth, joins the sublime of the ocean which also signifies death, the end of the journey. This natural course of things translates Syntax's travel into a natural compulsion for movement, though with a different end. Since

[42] Ibid., p. 10.
[43] Ibid., p. 89.

the picturesque eye improves nature ("Whoe'er from Nature takes a view,/ Must copy and improve it too"[44]), picturesque travel is natural, but it is also better because there's no room for the roaring of the ocean in it. Hence the necessity of there being a home to return to, of a place from which one can depart again and return rather than die in the monstrous ocean and see no more. Writing one's travel, one commemorates one's life (the picturesque part of the stream) as a travel and makes it present in the form of a complete book. Only then can one return home, from which one has naturally escaped due to the natural compulsion for travelling (life is a journey), thus improving the home by making it a task of one's travel, a fragment of one's life. The improvement of Syntax's home began, as we have seen, the moment he stood up from his chair and started walking about his room — it was then that his wife would for the first time listen to him. Sitting at home, if life is a journey, means death. Life begins with a journey which redefines home as a place of return to the place where one had not quite lived, but which now will become more vivid, less monotonous, even, say, picturesque. Interestingly, this return to the place where one was dead is also a return to a place of destination which, in the case of the unimproved natural course of life is the sublime ocean and the end of seeing which is the end of living. Home, for the picturesque traveller, also gives shelter from death.

The end of Doctor Syntax's travel is a home enlivened by fame and money he expects from writing his tour. The rust of sedentary life he led will be worn off and he will lead a comfortable life of others who have already written their travels. Having spent three months at a 'Squires "warm mansion," Syntax, probably driven by the compulsion to travel (life is a journey), refuses the offer of staying there longer:

> "No," he exclaim'd "I must away: —
> I have a splendid book to make,
> To form a Tour, — to paint a Lake;
> And, by that well projected Tome,
> To carry fame and money home:
> And should I fail, my loving wife
> Will lead me such a precious life,
> That I had better never more
> Approach my then forbidden door."[45]

There is no return home without "a Tour." Syntax's vivid mobility has to be completed in the fixed shape of the "tome," an object of economic exchange,

[44] Ibid., p. 11.
[45] Ibid., p. 90.

which will guarantee the stability of his home which, otherwise, will be inaccessible to him.

The stability of home seems to be the idea which motivates the very idea of the picturesque. Once a journey of life has been commonsensically written or drawn, made picturesque, then one can simply look at his tour with pleasure, without the risk of falling into Humean scepticism or vain attempts at communicating pure feelings. Metaphysical speculations lead to going on without end, as we have seen in Gilpin, to infinity, they destabilize and threaten with disorder. Philosophy goes, or travels, too far, and it simply cannot write "a tour" because the objects for which it searches are of such nature that they do not look nice in a picture. Instead of going into the nature of nature, it is enough to improve it a little and thus grant it the agreeable stability of nice objects, of souvenirs of sorts, which people thus made tourist may bring home and hang on the wall, for instance. A tourist's eye, unlike that of a philosopher, does not explore the world, it only sees things already made familiar and nice, things judged as worth seeing, as sights, by guidebook writers (such as Gilpin, for instance). Thus equipped, a tourist cannot really get lost, even if he encounters, like Syntax, a guide post with all its letters defaced as the very presence of the guide post is a mark that the tourist's route is proper. A written tour, which in the case of Syntax also brings economic growth, is an object which first of all brings order back home, a handbook of the syntax of the world which renders it accessible and learnable in one's armchair without any approaches of infinity, of the sublime landscapes for which there is no space in the rules of the picturesque improvement of the world.

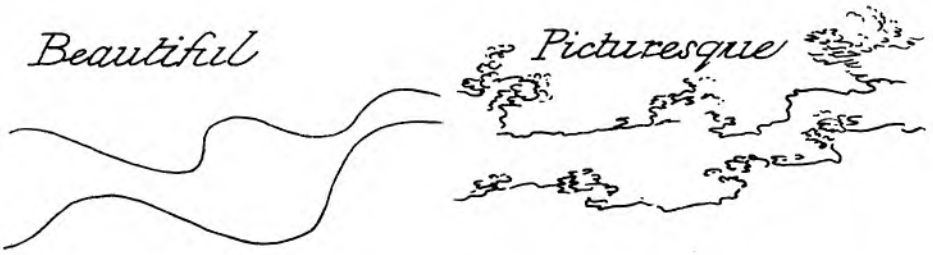


Illustration from J. C. Loudon, *Observations on the Formation and Management of Useful and Ornamental Plantationes; on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening; and on Gaining and Embanking Land from Rivers or the Sea* (Endinburgh: D. Wilson for Archibald Constable 1804)

IX

"Something fixed where all is moving"[1] (A Postscript)

> For almost two thousand years a vast and mysterious austral continent beckoned through the mists of terrible and haunted seas. Its shifting outlines hover along the southern rim of the world in those fantastic old cosmographies and mappemondes which record with such vivid fidelity the indomitable struggle of the imagination to overlap the barriers which it could not yet pierce.
>
> John Livingston Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu*

> Between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe this contradictory feeling — pleasure and pain, joy and anxiety, exaltation and depression — was christened or re-christened by the name of the sublime. It is around this name that the destiny of classical poetics was hazarded and lost; it is in this name that aesthetics asserted its critical rights over art, and that romanticism, in other words modernity, triumphed.
>
> Jean-Francois Lyotard

> Besides, he was almost sure that nothing can be really "unnamable." It didn's sound sensible to him.
>
> H. P. Lovecraft

To Coleridge a call for correction of nature, like Gilpin's, probably sounded like a blasphemy of sorts, an excitement to artificial feelings which

[1] Walter Pater on Coleridge (1866).

makes us callous to real ones, as he wrote in *Anima Poetae*.[2] So too Wordsworth, Samuel Monk notices,

> speaks with impatience of the jargon of the picturesque. To him, such analysis as that in which Gilpin indulged must have seemed another example of the use of "that false secondary power by which we multiply distinctions."[3]

Multiplication of distinctions makes us believe that eventually everything can be classified, and thus men become blind to Coleridge's real, probably less strictly categorized feelings. The Romantic primary power of imagination is the power of association beyond control, the power of feeling "too general an affinity with all things, and though it perceives the difference of things, yet is eternally pursuing the likenesses, or, rather, that which is common between them," as Coleridge put it, and whose verbalization frequently made Coleridge talk, "as Carlyle heard him, 'with eager musical energy, two stricken hours, his face radiant and moist, and communicate no meaning whatsoever to any individuals of his hearers.'"[4]

Coleridge's talk leads nowhere, to no discovery of a meaning. Unlike in Gilpin's guided tours, we get lost in a travel of a different kind, in the "movement of the imagination across the uncharted spaces of the world," as John Livingston Lowes says about *The Ancient Mariner* (1798).[5] This movement leads in a sense nowhere because the ship is not bound to discover anything. The ship crosses the line of difference, of classification and explores the territory which cannot be charted and then conquered. This has already been done by others.

Lyotard's identification of romanticism with modernity verging on the problematics of the sublime (cf. the epigram above)[6] is an identification which also verges on the re-discovery of the uncharted upon the already charted, of the absent within the present. Coleridge's search for something fixed where all is moving is the idea of there being a secondary imagination which, at least in *Biographia Literaria*, "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still, at all events, it struggles to idealize and unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead."[7] Dissolution which unifies

---

[2] *Coleridge. Poetry and Prose*, K. Raine, ed. (Penguin Books 1987), p. 136.

[3] S. Monk, *The Sublime...*, p. 229.

[4] Quoted in J. L. Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu* (New York: Vintage Books 1959), p. 285.

[5] Ibid., p. 110.

[6] J.-F. Lyotard, *The Inhuman. Reflections on Time*, trans. G. Bennington and R. Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press 1991), p. 92.

[7] *Coleridge...* (K. Raine, ed.), p. 191.

is obviously a paradoxical idea as it renders unity as an unfixed object of sorts, a living, vital object as opposed to objects which are "essentially fixed and dead."

The killing of the albatross as the gesture of the refusal to return back to the familiar, to return back home, suspends the idea of a secure presence, of a fixed totality, by forcing the mariner to be a "witness to the fact that there is indeterminacy," as Lyotard phrases it.[8] It is, I think, this being of indeterminacy, the being whose being cannot be determined, that makes the sublime a living object which escapes theorization, both in romanticism and in modernism, exactly as a 'non-object,' as the non-absent absence which I have already mentioned in the beginnings of this text. The sublime, the discursive presence of indeterminacy, of the unpresentable, is the paradoxical presence in which the eighteenth-century thinkers did not see any reality, and which they offered as the space of potential exploration and theorization so as to absorb the approaches of infinity within the capacity of the human mind and thus make it finite, determinable. The sublime was real only as difference, a horror which promises the pleasure of the eventual discovery which can then be mapped upon the determined territory of the human.

With Coleridge, perhaps, the sublime becomes what Lyotard, rightly or wrongly, terms "the inhuman," the cohabitation of the limit with the limitless, the properly human with the inhuman.[9] It is exactly this paradoxical kind of cohabitation that makes the idea of the sublime a synonym of indeterminacy, of the suspension of the determining presence of difference as limit in Coleridge's reluctant "definition" of the sublime which he pronounced "to consist in a suspension of the powers of comparison."[10] Such a suspension is obviously also the suspension of the possibility of there being a sublime as contrary to anything else, "a propaedeutic to the teaching [...] of the inside without outside,"[11] of the inside which, as boundless, can only be the totality of the infinite which cannot be totalized.

The suspension of difference, of the powers of comparison, also means putting one's mind to a stop, an experience so unwelcome to Addison, for instance. If for Carlyle, as we have seen, Coleridge's talk was a total suspension of meaning, of the conclusion of his talk as a discovery of its subject, it was so because of Carlyle's having posited the meaning outside

---

[8] J.-F. Lyotard, *The Inhuman...*, p. 101.

[9] Cf. J.-F. Lyotard, *The Inhuman...*, p. 2.

[10] Cf. R. Holmes, *Coleridge. Early Visions* (Penguin Books 1989), p. 230.

[11] J. S. Cutsinger, "Inside without Outside: Coleridge, the Form of the One, and God," in *The Interpretation of Belief. Coleridge, Schleiermacher and Romanticism* (London: MacMillan 1986), p. 69.

the talk, in the future, as something different from the talk. Suspending the powers of comparison, Coleridge does not give one TIME to step back from the very production of difference, from the indeterminacy which suspends the future revelation of a meaning and the exploitation of the meaning so revealed by history as a past event. The meaning can be determined only away from the sublime as an inside away from the outside, both in time and space. The practice of indeterminacy suspends this movement and becomes a paradoxical epistemology of the present which cannot be made present, whose very logic renders an attempt at its presentation as a step away form the present which makes the present present to history, and absent from the present thus reactivating the powers of comparison. Coleridge's talk (or writing) does not promise anything there and then, but arrests us in the face of difference, of the as yet unnamed which he will not name by any proper name, and which only tentatively can be called, say, after Lovecraft, the unnameable.

Having suspended the powers of comparison Coleridge shifts his gaze to the present without any attempt at diminishing it by means of an outside, of stopping the movement of the oxymoronic "something fixed where all is moving" by means of a limit which is always already the limit of time. Coleridge's ship, manned by an ancient mariner, is a ship which will not take us, or lead us, to a new world, to a secure space away from the movement of the sea. We must remain on board a ship bound "not indeed in search of the New World, like Columbus and his adventurers, nor yet an other world, that is to come, but in search of the other world that now is, and ever has been tho' undreamt of by the Many,"[12] says Coleridge inevitably returning to the marinistic metaphor.

NOW is THE OTHER world, the world of THE OTHER which can only be expressed by expressing the inexpressible, the unnamable (Lovecraft), the unpresentable (Lyotard), *différance* (Derrida), from the paradoxical position(s) of now and then (now has ever been), here and there ...

---

[12] *Coleridge on Logic and Learning*, A. D. Snyder, ed. (New Haven 1929), p. 1.

Bibliography

Allen, Robert J., ed. *Addison and Steele. Selections from 'The Tatler' and 'The Spectator.'* New York: Holt Rinehart & Winston 1961.

Almeida, Hermione, de. *Romantic Medicine and John Keats.* New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1991.

Armstrong, Nancy. *Desire and Domestic Fiction. A Political History of the Novel.* New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1987.

Berthes, Roland. "From Work to Text." Trans. S. Heat. In *Image-Music-Text.* S. Heath, ed. (Fontana/Collins 1977).

Battie, William. *A Treatise on Madness.* London 1757.

Benedict, Michael, ed. *Cyberspace: First Steps.* Massachusetts: MIT Press 1991.

Bennington, Geoff, Young, Robert. "Introduction: Posing the Question." In *Post-structuralism and the Question of History.* D. Attridge, G. Bennington, R. Young, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1987.

Blake, William. *The Complete Poems.* W. H. Stevenson, ed. London and New York: Longman 1989.

Blanchot, Maurice. *Le Pas au-dela.* Paris: Gallimard 1973.

Blanchot, Maurice. "The Absence of the Book." In *Deconstruction in Context. Literature and Philosophy.* M. C. Taylor, ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1986.

Bloom, Harold. *Poetry and Repression. Revisionism from Blake to Stevens.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1976.

Bogel, Frederic V. *Literature and Insubstantiality in Later Eighteenth-Century England.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1984.

Bunyan, John. *The Pilgrim's Progress.* Penguin Books 1987.

Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful.* London 1812.

Burke, Edmund. *Reflections on the French Revolution.* London 1955.

Byrd, Max. *London Transformed; Images of the City in the Eighteenth Century.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1978.

Cascardi, Anthony, J. "From the Sublime to the Natural: Romantic Responses to Kant." In *Literature and the Question of Philosophy.* A. J. Cascardi, ed. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1987.

Castle, Terry. "The Female Thermometer." *Representations,* No. 17, Winter 1987, p. 2.

Combe, William. *The Tour of Doctor Syntax in Search of the Picturesque. A Poem.* London: Methuen 1903.

Cottom, Daniel. "Taste and the Civilized Imagination." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism,* XXXIX/4, Summer 1981.

Crowther, Paul. *The Kantian Sublime. From Morality to Art.* Oxford: Clarendon Press 1989.
Cutsinger, James, S. "Inside without Outside: Coleridge, the Form of the One, and God." In *The Interpretation of Belief. Coleridge, Schleiermacher and Romanticism.* D. Jasper, ed. London: MacMillan 1986.
Damrosch Jr., Leopold. *Symbol and Truth in Blake's Myth.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1980.
Darwin, Erasmus. *A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools.* Dublin 1798.
Derrida, Jacques. *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs.* Trans. N. Graver. Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1973.
Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology.* Trans. Gayatri Spivak. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1976.
Derrida, Jacques. *Dissemination.* Trans. B. Johnson. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1981.
Derrida, Jacques. *Margins of Philosophy.* Trans. A. Bass. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1982.
Derrida, Jacques. *The Truth in Painting.* Trans. G. Bennington and I. McLeod. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1987.
Doerner, Klaus. *Madness and the Bourgeoisie. A Social History of Insanity and Psychiatry.* Trans. J. Neugroschel and J. Steinberg. Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1981.
Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1983.
Eagleton, Terry. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1990.
Felman, Shoshana. *Writing and Madness (Literature/Philosophy/Psychoanalysis).* Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press 1985.
Flores, Ralph. *The Rhetoric of Doubtful Authority. Deconstructive Readings of Self-Questioning Narratives, St. Augustine to Faulkner.* Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 1984.
Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization. A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason.* Trans. R. Howard. New York: Vintage Books 1973.
Frye, Northrop. *A Study of English Romanticism.* New York: Random House 1968.
Gay, Peter. *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation.* Vol. 1. *The Rise of Modern Paganism.* New York: Knopf 1966.
Gilpin, William. *Three Essays. On Picturesque Beauty; On Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape: To which is added a poem on Landscape Painting.* London 1792.
Gisbourne, Thomas. *Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex.* London 1789.
Godwin, William. *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice.* Penguin Books 1985.
Goldstein, Laurence. *Ruins and Empire. The Evolution of Theme in Augustan and Romantic Literature.* Pittsburgh 1977.
Gray, Noel. "Seeing Nature. The Mathematization of Experience in Virtual Realities." Unpublished paper presented at the ISSEI conference (European Integration and the European Mind: Cultural Hegemony or Dialogue of Cultures), Aalborg, August 1992.
Gray, Thomas. *Letters of Thomas Gray.* London 1820.
Hagstrum, Jean H. "William Blake Rejects the Enlightenment." In *Blake. A Collection of Critical Essays.* N. Frye, ed. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, Inc. 1966.
Hillis Miller, J. *The Disappearance of God.* Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press 1975.
Holmes, Richard *Coleridge. Early Visions.* Penguin Books 1989, p. 230.
Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature.* L. A. Selby-Bigge, ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1981.

Hume, David. *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the principles of Morals*. L. A. Selby-Bigge, ed. Oxford 1978.

Hunt, John D. and Willis, Peter eds. *The Genius of the Place. The English Landscape Garden 1620—1820*. London: Paul Elek 1975.

Jarrett, David. *The Gothic Form in Fiction and its Relation to History*. Winchester: King Alfred's College 1980.

Johnson, Samuel. *Selected Writings*. P. T. Cruttwell, ed. Penguin Books 1986.

Kalaga, Wojciech. "Teleology without a Telos." *Znakolog*, Vol. 3, 1991.

Kant, Immanuel. *The Critique of Judgement*. Trans. I. C. Meredith. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1973.

Kerrigan, William. "Atoms Again: The Deaths of Individualism." In *Taking Chances: Derrida, Psychoanalysis, and Literature*. J. H. Smith and W. Kerrigan, eds. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1984.

Knight, Richard, Payne. *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste*. London 1805.

Kosofsky Sedgwick, Eve. *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*. New York and London: Methuen 1986.

Laing, Ronald, D. *The Divided Self. An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*. Penguin Books 1969.

La Mettrie, Julien Offray, de. "Man a Machine." In *Les philosophes*. N. L. Torey, ed. New York: Capricorn Books 1980.

Longinus. *On the Sublime*. Trans. T. S. Dorsch. In Aristotle/Horace/Longinus. *Classical Literary Criticism*. Penguin Books 1965, p. 107.

Longueil, Alfred E. "The Word 'Gothic' in Eighteenth-Century Criticism." *Modern Language Notes*, xxxviii (1923).

Lowes, John Livingston. *The Road to Xanadu*. New York: Vintage Books 1959.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1984.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois. "The Sign of History." In *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History*. D. Attridge, G. Bennington and R. Young, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1987.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois. *The Inhuman. Reflections on Time*. Trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby. Cambridge: Polity Press 1991.

Mackenzie, Henry. *The Man of Feeling*. London 1967.

Monk, Samuel, H. *The Sublime*. Michigan: The University of Michigan Press 1960.

Mullan, John. *Sentiment and Sociability. The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century*. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1988.

Podbielski, Henryk. *Introduction* to: Arystoteles. *Poetyka*. Ossolineum: Wrocław 1983.

Punter, David. *The Literature of Terror. A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*. London and New York: Kongman 1980.

Rabasa, Jose. "Allegories of the Atlas." In *Europe and its Others*. F. Barker, P. Hulme, M. Inersen, D. Loxley, eds. Colchester: University of Essex 1985.

Raine, Kathleen, ed. *Coleridge. Poetry and Prose*. Penguin Books 1987, p. 136.

Robinson, Nicolas. *A New System of the Spleen, Vapours, and Hypochindriac Melancholy*. London 1726.

Rogers, Pat, ed. *The Context of English Literature. The Eighteenth Century*. London: Methuen 1978.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. "The Social Contract." In *Les philosophes*. N. L. Torrey, ed. New York: Capricorn Books 1960.

Satires on Women (1682, 1687, 1691). The Augustan Reprint Society. Los Angeles: University of California 1976.

Smart Christopher. *The Poetical Works of Christopher Smart.* Karin Willimason, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1980.

Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments.* Oxford 1976.

Sławek, Tadeusz. *The Outlined Shadow. Phenomenology, Grammatology, Blake.* Katowice: Uniwersytet Śląski 1985.

Snyder, A. D., ed. *Coleridge on Logic and Learning.* New Haven 1929.

Spivak, Gayatri. "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism." In *The Feminist Reader. Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism.* C. Belsey and J. Moore, eds. McMillan 1989.

Swedenborg, Emanuel. *Charity.* Translated from the Latin by William F. Wunsch. New York: Swedenborg Foundation 1982.

Taylor, Mark C., ed. *Deconstruction in Context. Literature and Philosophy.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

White, Hayden. *Tropics of Discourse. Essays in Cultural Criticism.* Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1987.

Wilson, Andrew. *Turner and the Sublime.* London: British Museum Publications 1980.

Tadeusz Rachwał

Zbliżenia nieskończoności. O wzniosłości i społeczności
Studia o piśmiennictwie osiemnastowiecznym

Streszczenie

Punktem wyjścia pracy jest spojrzenie na rolę pojęcia wzniosłości w teorii poststrukturalistycznej i postomodernizmie (głównie J.-F. Lyotard). Posługując się takimi kategoriami, jak "niewyrażalne", "nieobecna obecność" czy też "czas poza czasem", teoretycy postmodernizmu wyraźnie podnoszą i wysuwają na czoło te same kwestie, które intrygowały dyskurs osiemnastego stulecia; były one jednak traktowane przez czołowych myślicieli tej epoki jako niepożądana sfera transgresji, jako sfera niebezpieczna dla porządku społecznego. W części analitycznej autor koncentruje się na poszukiwaniu jednostkowych prób przekroczenia granic ustanowionych przez zestaw norm społecznych w kontekście usiłującego ograniczyć te przekroczenia dominującego dyskursu oświeceniowego (rozdz. I).

Rozdział II pracy stanowi krytyczne omówienie poglądów estetycznych Josepha Addisona, zawartych w cyklu esejów poświęconych sile wyobraźni, publikowanych w czasopiśmie "The Spectator". Rozdział III poświęcony jest kwestii sceptycyzmu filozoficznego w obliczu sfer nieskończoności. Czytelnik znajdzie tu dyskusję na temat prawa, moralności i porządku społecznego na podstawie tez Hume'a i La Mettriego. Rozdział IV zajmuje się osiemnastowiecznym pojęciem "smaku" jako kategorią niezwykle istotną w tworzeniu się dyskursu estetycznego, lecz zarazem kategorią ekonomiczną i polityczną dyktującą — poprzez niezwykle popularne wtedy pojęcie "geniuszu miejsca" — uporządkowanie świata jako ogrodu i zarazem sankcjonujące podbój kolonialny. Rozdziały V i VI poświęcone są kategorii "wzniosłości" w ujęciu filozoficznym (Burke, Kant), estetycznym (Blake), religijnym (Swedenborg) i politycznym (Godwin). Przedmiotem rozdziałów VII i VIII jest rola pojęcia "wzniosłości" w rozwoju tzw. filozofii sentymentalnej oraz rola tej filozofii w rozwoju myśli estetycznej. Zamykający pracę rozdział IX jest omówieniem wczesnoromantycznej przemiany w podejściu do kategorii wzniosłości oraz próbą wykazania pewnych związków pomiędzy romantyzmem a postmodernizmem, związków wynikających z krytycznego podejścia do "wzniosłości" jako kategorii możliwej do ogarnienia przez dyskurs filozoficzny.

Tadeusz Rachwał

Approches de l'infini. Du sublime et du social
Recherches sur la littérature du 18[e] siècle

Résumé

L'étude du rôle de la notion du sublime dans la théorie poststructuraliste et dans le post-modernisme (surtout J.-F. Lyotard) constitue le point de départ du présent ouvrage. En se servant des catégories telles que "l'inexprimable", "la présence absente" ou bien "le temps au delà du temps", les théories sus-mentionnées soulèvent et avancent les mêmes questions qui avaient déjà intrigué le discours du XVIII[e] siècle; pourtant elles furent traitées par les philosophes les plus éminents de l'époque comme une sphère indésirable de la transgression, comme une sphère menaçant l'ordre social. Dans la partie analythique l'auteur se concentre sur une recherche des essais individuels ayant pour but principal de franchir les limites établies par l'ensemble des normes sociales dans le contexte du discours dominant du Siècle des Lumières, celui-ci tendant à restreindre ces transgressions.

Le II[e] chapitre du présent ouvrage constitue une discussion critique portant sur les opinions esthétiques de Joseph Addison, contenues dans un cycle d'essais consacrés à la force de l'imagination, et publiés dans les colonnes de "The Spectator".

Le III[e] chapitre aborde le problème du scepticisme philosophique vis-à-vis les sphères de l'infini. Le lecteur y trouvera une discussion au sujet de la loi, de la morale et de l'ordre public à la base des thèses de Hume et de La Mettrie. Le IV[e] chapitre s'occupe de la notion du "goût" en tant que catégorie particulièrement importante dans la naissance du discours esthétique, mais en même temps catégorie économique et politique qui, à travers la notion extraordinairement en vogue du "génie de l'endroit", stipulait la mise en ordre du monde en tant que jardin, tout en sanctionnant la conquête coloniale. Les chapitres V[e] et VI[e] sont consacrés à la catégorie du "sublime" perçue philosophiquement (Burke, Kant), esthétiquement (Blake), traitée du point de vue de la religion (Swedenborg) et de la politique (Godwin). L'objet des chapitres VII[e] et VIII[e] c'est le rôle de la notion du "sublime" dans le développement de la "philosophie sentimentale" et l'importance de cette philosophie dans le développement de la pensée esthétique. Le IX[e] chapitre clôt le présent ouvrage et définit le changement, survenu au début du romantisme, de la perception de la catégorie du sublime, tout en essayant de démontrer certaines relations entre le romantisme et le post-modernisme, celles-ci résultant de l'approche critique du "sublime" en tant que catégorie susceptible de se faire saisir par le discours philosophique.

Executive Editor
JERZY STENCEL

Technical Editor
HALINA KRAMARZ

Proof-reader
LUKRECJA WAWRZYCZEK

Copyright © 1993
by Uniwersytet Śląski
All rights reserved

ISSN 0208-6336
ISBN 83-226-0523-4

Published by
Uniwersytet Śląski
ul. Bankowa 12B, 40-007 Katowice

First impression. Edition: 250+50 copies. Printed sheets: 9.25. Publishing sheets: 12.5. Passed to the Printing Works in August 1993. Signed for printing in December 1993.

Order No. 459/93 Price: zł 40 000.—

Printed by Drukarnia Uniwersytetu Śląskiego
ul. 3 Maja 12, 40-096 Katowice

nr inw.: BGN - 286
BG N 286/1368

ISSN 0208-6336
ISBN 83-226-0523-4